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JULY, 1918
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AINSLEE'S

The Magazine That Entertains

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“EYES”

A MAN was bewitched by the eyes of a certain beautiful unknown. The couple meet, of course; but under circumstances 'way out of the ordinary. The story is brilliantly told by Arthur Crabb in the August number of AINSLEE'S, "the magazine that entertains."

The novelette in the same issue is entitled "The Masquerading Flyer," by a favorite author with AINSLEE'S readers,

I. A. R. WYLIE

There will also be a long installment of the new May Edginton serial, "Angels," and features by Lucy Stone Terrill, Alan Dale, Robert W. Sneddon, Anice Terhune, etc.

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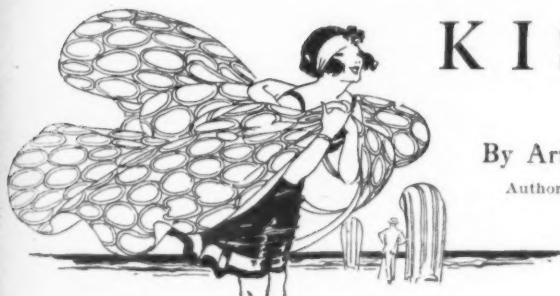


AINSLEE'S

VOL. XLI.

JULY, 1918.

No. 6.



KISSED

By Arthur Somers Roche

Author of "Loot," "Plunder," etc.

CHAPTER I.

IT was hot, and by the simple expedient of sending a partner who was rather a bore after water, and not remaining where he had left her, she had won a few moments to herself. The rear veranda of the clubhouse was deserted. Also, it was dark. A younger element had had influence with a board of governors. After all, there was something to be said in the youngsters' favor. Proposing in automobiles, motor boats, aëroplanes was rather difficult. And in these days when there were no more darkened porches, but screened and electric-lighted, grass-matted, lounge-chaired annexes to drawing or living rooms—give youth a chance! And so the rear veranda of the Oceanside Club was dark.

But it was hardly half past nine. Flirtations had not passed the birdlike-glance stage yet. By and by, say in half an hour, certain hearts would throb at meanings read into certain expressions in certain eyes; half an hour after that, a hand or two would be furtively pressed; a dainty squeeze or so would be offered in payment. And a little after that would begin the sublimely

nonchalant procession to the darkened veranda.

Crude, eh? Exactly what Simeon Lorry, the club secretary, had said to Major Fielding, chairman of the board of governors, that time Lorry had— But let Mr. Lorry tell it.

"I distinctly, major—*distinctly*, I tell you—heard a—er— Curse it, man, young Turner is kissing some one out there!"

"No, not some one, Lorry," said the major. "Polly Peters. And—er—curse *me*, Lorry, if I blame him! And listen, Lorry, not having lights on that rear veranda has led to nine engagements, six marriages, two babies, and—er—expectations, in the last fourteen months. And if your delicate ears are affronted by an—er—audible sibilance that—er—indicates certain future—ah—expectations, you're a crusty old bachelor, sir, and can soak your head until your ears become toughened!"

So the veranda remained darkened on all evenings when there was a dance going on at the Oceanside Club. For which Constance was duly grateful. No one would come looking for her here; sacred to youth as the veranda was on

dance nights, it was sacred to youth in couples. It was not good form to seek any one here. For the one you sought might be found with another and—you took her out here; you did not find her here.

Wherefore, the hour, the unwritten rule of darkness, and good form all conspired in favor of Constance. She was alone! A little thrill ran through her as she recognized her aloneness. It was hard to be alone these days. It had been hard ever since Merton Torrey had looked upon her and found her—ugh!—good.

Of course, Constance could retire to her room, but only at night, and then there were several hours—always—before she could rid herself of the vision of Torrey's hateful face, so aggressively clean-shaven, so— It was such a facial sort of face; so many features, if you knew what Constance meant. That is to say, surmounting a neck and being in front of the back of a head, it blatantly advertised itself as being a face, and— Ugh!

And even in her room—— Suppose she went there during the day. There was a time when her mother would have let her alone; such a glorious time, beginning on the day after Constance's twenty-seventh birthday and lasting almost three years; that period when, after two years of sighing, Mrs. Keener, Constance's devoted mother, had arrived reluctantly at the conclusion that her daughter was destined to be an *old maid*.

The sighing, the headshaking—these had been hard to bear. They had been irritating, but amply paid for by the almost three years that had followed—the three years during which Constance had been allowed to take up kindergarten, sloyd, bookbinding, the Drama League, suffrage, and settlement work. It was the last that had meant the end of freedom, the beginning of not-aloneness.

For Merton Torrey had called at the settlement house to talk about five thousand dollars that he had almost promised to the good work, and Miss Carney, the chief worker, had turned him over to Constance.

"A dollar a word, Conny—that's absolute-ly his lowest price. He never gives without a string of words tied to the gift. Listen, there's a dear, will you?"

And Constance had listened—listened so wonderfully that Torrey was inquiring her address even at the time when Constance was dancing on one foot, head bent over.

"What for? To shake the words out of my ears," Constance had told Miss Carney.

But one week later, at the Oceanside spring tennis tournament, Torrey had gained Constance's side, to remain there all afternoon. And it was rather— Oh, more than rather, considering the uppishness of certain young girls' mothers to Conny's mother. No, you wouldn't call it uppishness; pitying condescension was more like it. Well, just to please mother, then. And, of course, even though Torrey was a dreadful bore and somehow affected Constance as woolen underwear affects the sort of people who wear woolen underwear, one couldn't lose sight of the fact that he was one of the Torreys, that he possessed somewhere between ten and eighty millions of dollars, depending on whether you read the *Globe* or the *Courier*, and that socially—w-e-l-l!

So Conny had been "nice" to Torrey, never realizing that freedom and aloneness were being tossed by the board.

For Mrs. Keener's dead hopes were suddenly born again. Now she knew what Conny had been waiting for. Conny had never intended to throw herself away on some unappreciative sort of man, to whom femininity meant well-darned socks and clever coffee in the morning. No, indeed! Mrs. Keener

had always known that her daughter would hold herself precious, awaiting the arrival of the true knight who would—

"Cut it, mother, there's a blessed!" Constance had at first remonstrated. "I've waited for several reasons; one being that I've never seen the man I'd marry, and another being that no one ever asked me."

"Just because you evaded them, dear."

"H'm! Maybe. They're easily dodged," said the frank Constance.

"Because you've made them afraid of you. You're *such* a beauty, Conny, and the exquisite purity that you radiate—"

"Oh, mo-ther! If you knew how impure that word 'pure' sounds! And you know I'm absolutely nuts on eugenics, too."

"Because you do not understand, my dear," said Mrs. Keener, slightly shocked.

And now it had been going on for five months. At every dance of the Oceanside Club, at every golf or tennis tournament, Merton Torrey had been present. And he had managed to call upon Constance at least once a week.

The tyranny of women is understood only by their unmarried daughters rising thirty. Constance endured it. And so the not-aloneness. Having given up the fight, at twenty-five Constance had been prepared to brave the world; at thirty the world held less of romance, was rather a soiled thing, and if one braved it, one became mussy. The ascendancy of Mrs. Keener was greater now than five years ago.

It was a losing fight, Constance felt. Such a prosaic thing as purse strings counted for so much. How many times, recently, had Mrs. Keener hinted that a mother loved to make sacrifices for her daughter, in order that that daughter might appear to best advantage?

"So that Torrey will propose?" Constance had queried bitterly.

Mrs. Keener was shocked.

"I love my little girl. She mustn't think that I want to get rid of her. But mother knows best. Mother wants you to be happy, and mother knows what is best for your happiness."

And even the privacy of her own chamber was denied her, for Mrs. Keener would drop in there for comfy chats, all about how glorious it would be to be the mistress of eighty millions—Mrs. Keener never *bought* the *Courier*; she borrowed it from one of her maids—and what a work for *good* said mistress of aforesaid millions might accomplish. And when Mrs. Keener was not bodily present in Constance's chamber, the memory of her recent words was there and—

Somewhat or other, for several months, Constance had not felt alone until this moment on the rear veranda of the Oceanside Club, overlooking the twelfth hole and the thirteenth tee and, beyond, the shimmering sands and the surf. Of course, to-night, one could see none of these, although one could imagine that one saw little gleaming spots that were the crests of waves. But as the night was starless and moonless, it was probably imagination.

And Constance was glad that there was no light. Even a star would have been offensive to-night. For she was *alone*. She could *think*, without the certainty that her mother was down-stairs wondering whether a bright little chat wouldn't cheer dear Conny up and drive away those morbid, unwomanly thoughts that too often entered her dear little girl's little brain.

No, Conny had simply *had* to leave the house to-night, although her mother's eyebrows had risen when she had learned that, despite Torrey's unavoidable detention in the city, Constance still intended to attend the dance at the

club. And Constance would go alone. It was silly of her mother to talk chaperonage; Constance was thirty years of age. And so her mother, reminded that Constance had visited city slums unchaperoned, stopped arguing.

Constance had looked forward to a lively dance or two. But the wicked magic of the name of Merton Torrey had done its worst. Who were the young business or professional men of the very respectable middle-class colony that made and supported the country club, to lift their eyes to the chosen of Merton Torrey, who was worth from ten to eighty millions? And as Torrey's intentions were so perfectly, tiresomely honorable, like the owner of the intentions, and were so equally obvious—he meant marriage, *any one* knew—the young eligibles asked themselves what was the use? Besides, they'd always been the least bit afraid of Conny Keener. Brains, you know. Questioned a fellow. Why? Asked reasons, your authority, all that sort of rot.

And so—well, Constance was out on the veranda. She thought. What an utterly futile thing was the life of a girl of the middle class, whose parents were well to do, too rich to educate her to work for a living and not rich enough to plunge her, willy-nilly, into that substitute for a career, the life of a society woman?

Constance thought of all the things that she had puttered at; sloyd, settlement work—because she hadn't *had* to work, she'd puttered. A perfectly good brain had gone to seed. At least, if the brain hadn't gone to seed, the will to use the brain had weakened.

Her mother, of course, had said that Constance's change from one avocation to another had been mere restlessness. The dear girl hadn't found herself; she wouldn't until her true knight came along. But Constance knew better now. The restlessness had been a perfectly natural desire to *do* something.

The change had been because of her unconscious realization that she was not needed; that as a sloyd teacher, she'd never be a success, because she lacked the big incentive, the need for money; that as a settlement worker, she'd never be a shining light because subconsciously she was always aware that if she contracted some disease from the mussy children, or broke down from overwork, there was always her big and comfortable home awaiting her. She had been restless, but now she recognized her limitations; it was not the restlessness of genius—she had none—it was the restlessness of boredom; and perhaps—Conny became suddenly honest with herself—maybe there was the least bit of truth in what her mother said. Was it possible that she, Constance Keener, had been awaiting a man? Was she any stronger than nature, after all? Did her ineffectualness mean that she was killing time until—

Suddenly she felt a glow all over her, the blush of shame. Was she, who called herself icy, who had never responded to the glance or word or touch of man, unresponsive merely because, as she had heard people put it, Mr. Right had not come along?

It could not be so! When Conny married, if she ever did, it would be after long acquaintance, in which the mutuality of taste had been evidenced—purely intellectual. Well, of course there'd be babies—one, anyway.

The blush became painful. Visualization of babies had visualized the blatant face of Merton Torrey, blatant because—well, because—well, it was a face, mouth, ears, nose, lips—just face, with its features meant to see or hear or talk or eat; a face, in short, to be used for facial purposes, not as a window of the soul, a mirror of the spirit, or—

Babies! The hot blush died. Cool as ice she became, yet depressed. No, she didn't want marriage until a mar-

riage that would be based upon intellectual companionship, upon a camaraderie of the soul, until that sort of marriage were offered her. She knew now, once and for all time, that the only way she could be won would be through her brain, not through her emotions. And unless her brain were captivated, her emotions would be dead. Thank God for that—for the knowledge that had come to her out of this starless, moonless night! For she had been tempted, oh, so bitterly! Her mother, Torrey's millions— But she wouldn't yield to temptation. She would be true to the best within her, to her demand for a union that was founded upon mental equality. Maybe her husband would be a bit more intellectual than she; in execution, though, not in appreciation. Ah, well, the first thing in the morning she'd write Torrey in answer to his formal proposal, made by mail, of which her mother was not aware. She would tell him that she was not the sort of wife for him. She would get onto the written page, somehow, something of that chaste iciness which, despite the blush of a moment ago, she knew to be her real self.

She stirred uneasily. After all, no need to be rude to young Bleakie, who had been her last partner and who probably was wandering disconsolately around with a glass of water, spilling drops here and there.

She would go in.

Something touched her hand, the hand that rested on the veranda rail. It was warm, vibrant. A hand! Firmly it clasped hers, so firmly that it forced her hand against the rail, hard. She glanced down, wondering at her disinclination to scream. Dimly defined in the shadow was a man. At least the hardness of the hand that covered her own was not feminine. And no woman would try to scale this veranda from the ground.

"Ouch!" she said, as the full weight

of the person below ground her palm into the rail.

He had swung himself up now, was separated from her only by the width of the rail, her face but inches from his own.

He shifted his grip from her hand to the rail. He leaned a little bit forward. His face was less than an inch from hers now. Behind him the moon suddenly shone through the clouds that had so long obscured it. He saw her face.

And even as, in embarrassment from this proximity, she would have drawn away, he kissed her!

CHAPTER II.

For what seemed minutes, hours, Constance let these uninvited masculine lips touch hers. The man had thrown one arm about her shoulders, pressing her close to him. Against her bosom she felt his heart, racing, thumping. And her own heart—

Something seemed to have broken within Constance. Perhaps that hot blush of a moment ago had been the forewarning, as a dam, about to burst, signals the oncoming flood by little jets.

She had thought that these jetlike emotions of a moment ago had been blockaded, held back forever. But now! Suddenly she became conscious that not only was she receiving a kiss, but that she was returning it—fervently. Her lips were clinging to the smooth lips of this stranger man, melting into his with a fervor that horrified her, shocked her. Violently she wrenched herself free. Almost without volition, her small, clenched fist swung upward in an arc and struck the stranger upon the lips that had clung to hers just now. The suddenness of the blow, probably, more than its weight—though Constance was by no means a fragile girl—loosened his grasp upon the veranda rail. Dimly, in the dark, she saw him sway; then, with

the instinctive action of one losing his balance, turn and leap to the lawn below. Not a sound had come from him. Not a sound had come from Constance.

But as his feet thudded upon the turf below, the sound galvanized Constance into action. Like any débutante feigning fear of a mouse, she gathered her skirts about her and raced into the building. Once inside, she paused. Thank Heaven, there was no one in this sort of lounge room leading off the veranda! The music and the pat-pat of slippered and pumped feet assured her a moment's privacy, at any rate. With mixed emotions, she faced a pier glass.

Mixed emotions—anger, outrage, and—Constance was essentially honest—a wondering, delicious delight. Instinct had made her strike the mouth that had profaned her own. But an older instinct had first made her cling to that mouth, made her— She caught herself, as she noted her fiery color. She must dismiss such thoughts that were not— But it had been her first kiss. Men, greatly daring, had snatched kisses from Constance, and she had rebuked them with the spoken word. Never had she dreamed that she would *strike* a man. And she knew why she had struck this stranger on the mouth. Not because he had kissed her, but because *she* had kissed *him*!

Rearranging her hair, deftly touching the filmy straps that upheld her evening gown, she faced life anew. She, Constance Keener, had kissed a man and had struck a man, all in the same minute of time. And were it somehow required of her that she withdraw one of those actions, she would withdraw—she knew it—the blow.

She was not the same Constance who had fled the Keener home for privacy. She was not the same Constance she had known for thirty years. A new Constance, a Constance ready to dare much, to live fully, had suddenly been

born. It was this Constance that she faced, now, in the pier glass.

Freely she admitted the new identity that was hers. She admitted what would, ten minutes ago, have made her wish to die—that she loved a man whom she did not know, whose face and name were unfamiliar to her, but whose lips she knew.

It was bizarre; it was—indecent. But the truth is often bizarre, is often—No, it wasn't indecent. There could be nothing indecent about something that had transcended passion. For that kiss— Passion there had been, yes, but something more, something infinitely bigger—a recognition of the fact that the owner of that masculine mouth held an appeal for her that, though indefinable, could be nothing less than love.

Viciously Constance shook herself. How was it possible that she dwelt on the thought of love where the only acquaintance was of the lips? Was it possible that in her nature was something lawless, something defiant of restraint, of convention, something not—"nice?"

But she discarded this unpleasant thought. It was not true. She knew herself too well for that. *Any* mouth, *any* lips, could not have aroused in her the passion of tenderness, the soul-filling desire to give, to suffer, to endure, that were now struggling for expression within her.

Thirty years of acquaintance with herself had taught her something of herself. If there had been any time in her life when a physical passion could have masqueraded as love and deceived her, that time was a dozen years behind her. True, the evocation of this love that had so suddenly blossomed within her had been physical, a kiss, but—then again, it hadn't. The kiss had been the key that had unlocked certain unguessed-at treasures, and— Suddenly it came to Constance, fully, that

she did not know the man who had kissed her, whom she had kissed—came to her not as a bit of knowledge, but as a calamity that brought other calamities in its train.

Suppose—he were married! Constance blanched. Suppose—strangely enough, this was much worse—that she had been just a pretty girl upon whom the moonlight had suddenly shone, and that he, having kissed, having been struck, had gone off afraid, to remain afraid, never to let her know—

Something as primitive as the emotion that had made her strike the stranger man stirred her now. He was *not* married! She *knew* that! And the man who could arouse in her all that had been latent, unknown, could not be a coward. The blow that she had given him would but whet the will that had made him kiss her. And yet doubts came to her. He had offended all the conventions and might fear that convention ruled her, that to disclose himself would be to unstopper the vials of her scorn. He might fear that any chance of winning her would be negatived by confession of his identity.

So, then, must she await the moment when, after months—oh, weeks, anyway!—of attention, he deemed himself on solid ground with her? Must something so exotic, so wonderfully alien to anything she had known run the accustomed conventional course? Must the sweetest thing in the world be delayed in acquisition, in acknowledged possession, because of a conventionality that he would be timid about flouting? That blow! Why had she yielded to a caven-woman impulse, the impulse to hold herself precious when the man who had kissed her—she *knew* this—despite his daring, would never think of holding her as aught but precious? For in that kiss of his had been more than an impulse; or, if it had been an impulse, then it was an impulse that, like her own, had been founded on the sudden

discovery of love. And a love that had leaped into being like that was too rare a thing to be convention bound.

An idea came to her, and, acting upon it, she went out upon the veranda again. But he was not lurking on the turf below. She shook her head sadly. Of course not. He would think her outraged, insulted. Love must run its deadly slow course; she must be wooed, courted, all the rest of it; when she didn't want to be; when, despite all that she had assured herself—*mother was right*. She had been waiting for her "own true knight."

Well, she wouldn't wait any longer. One thing was certain; the stranger man's shirt bosom had gleamed faintly white. Evening dress. Therefore, one of the guests at the dance to-night. Probably back in the ballroom by now. Perhaps awaiting her. She cast one glance outward toward the surf, wondering at lanterns that she saw gleaming between veranda and sands, probably about where the thirteenth tee was. She could dimly distinguish that there were several of these lights. Possibly the man who had kissed her was among that gathering. Shouts, mirthful shouts, reached her ears. Perhaps he was even telling of the stolen kiss! But she dismissed that thought instantly. The man who could arouse her love like this was not a cad, any more than he was a coward. And of course, as she had reasoned, he would not be a coward even if he didn't come right out and disclose himself and ask her to marry him this very night. He would not dare too much, lest he lose all. Perfectly justifiable caution; only—so *unnecessary*, if he only knew it!

"I've been looking everywhere for you. It—it *is* you, Miss Keener, isn't it?"

She turned to meet the faithful Bleakie.

"I have the water," he stated.

Fool! Yet she took the water and

the instinctive action of one losing his balance, turn and leap to the lawn below. Not a sound had come from him. Not a sound had come from Constance.

But as his feet thudded upon the turf below, the sound galvanized Constance into action. Like any débutante feigning fear of a mouse, she gathered her skirts about her and raced into the building. Once inside, she paused. Thank Heaven, there was no one in this sort of lounge room leading off the veranda! The music and the pat-pat of slippers and pumped feet assured her a moment's privacy, at any rate. With mixed emotions, she faced a pier glass.

Mixed emotions—anger, outrage, and—Constance was essentially honest—a wondering, delicious delight. Instinct had made her strike the mouth that had profaned her own. But an older instinct had first made her cling to that mouth, made her— She caught herself, as she noted her fiery color. She must dismiss such thoughts that were not— But it had been her first kiss. Men, greatly daring, had snatched kisses from Constance, and she had rebuked them with the spoken word. Never had she dreamed that she would *strike* a man. And she knew why she had struck this stranger on the mouth. Not because he had kissed her, but because *she* had kissed *him*!

Rearranging her hair, deftly touching the filmy straps that upheld her evening gown, she faced life anew. She, Constance Keener, had kissed a man and had struck a man, all in the same minute of time. And were it somehow required of her that she withdraw one of those *actionis*, she would withdraw—she knew it—the blow.

She was not the same Constance who had fled the Keener home for privacy. She was not the same Constance she had known for thirty years. A new Constance, a Constance ready to dare much, to live fully, had suddenly been

born. It was this Constance that she faced, now, in the pier glass.

Freely she admitted the new identity that was hers. She admitted what would, ten minutes ago, have made her wish to die—that she loved a man whom she did not know, whose face and name were unfamiliar to her, but whose lips she knew.

It was bizarre; it was—indecent. But the truth is often bizarre, is often—No, it wasn't indecent. There could be nothing indecent about something that had transcended passion. For that kiss— Passion there had been, yes, but something more, something infinitely bigger—a recognition of the fact that the owner of that masculine mouth held an appeal for her that, though indefinable, could be nothing less than love.

Viciously Constance shook herself. How was it possible that she dwelt on the thought of love where the only acquaintance was of the lips? Was it possible that in her nature was something lawless, something defiant of restraint, of convention, something not—"nice"?

But she discarded this unpleasant thought. It was not true. She knew herself too well for that. *Any* mouth, *any* lips, could not have aroused in her the passion of tenderness, the soul-filling desire to give, to suffer, to endure, that were now struggling for expression within her.

Thirty years of acquaintance with herself had taught her something of herself. If there had been any time in her life when a physical passion could have masqueraded as love and deceived her, that time was a dozen years behind her. True, the evocation of this love that had so suddenly blossomed within her had been physical, a kiss, but—then again, it hadn't. The kiss had been the key that had unlocked certain unguessed-at treasures, and— Suddenly it came to Constance, fully, that

she did not know the man who had kissed her, whom she had kissed—came to her not as a bit of knowledge, but as a calamity that brought other calamities in its train.

Suppose—he were married! Constance blanched. Suppose—strangely enough, this was much worse—that she had been just a pretty girl upon whom the moonlight had suddenly shone, and that he, having kissed, having been *struck*, had gone off afraid, to remain afraid, never to let her know—

Something as primitive as the emotion that had made her strike the stranger man stirred her now. He was *not* married! She *knew* that! And the man who could arouse in her all that had been latent, unknown, could not be a coward. The blow that she had given him would but whet the will that had made him kiss her. And yet doubts came to her. He had offended all the conventions and might fear that convention ruled her, that to disclose himself would be to unstopper the vials of her scorn. He might fear that any chance of winning her would be negatived by confession of his identity.

So, then, must she await the moment when, after months—oh, weeks, anyway!—of attention, he deemed himself on solid ground with her? Must something so exotic, so wonderfully alien to anything she had known run the accustomed conventional course? Must the sweetest thing in the world be delayed in acquisition, in acknowledged possession, because of a conventionality that he would be timid about flouting? That blow! Why had she yielded to a cavewoman impulse, the impulse to hold herself precious when the man who had kissed her—she *knew* this—despite his daring, would never think of holding her as aught but precious? For in that kiss of his had been more than an impulse; or, if it had been an impulse, then it was an impulse that, like her own, had been founded on the sudden

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"I've been looking everywhere for you. It—it is you, Miss Keener, isn't it?"

She turned to meet the faithful Bleakie.

"I have the water," he stated. "Fool! Yet she took the water and

drank it thirstily. She handed back the glass to him.

"A little faintness," she said. "The air—" she finished vaguely.

Young Bleakie was all concern.

"Oh, won't you let me see you home, Miss Keener?"

See her home! She would have liked to strike him as she had struck the stranger man so short—and yet so infinitely long—a time ago.

"Really, I'm all right now," she said.

"Then will you let me have the next?"

"Charmed," she assured him.

They turned inward, across the veranda, and another shout came from the lantern-lit distance.

"Crazy idiots!" laughed Bleakie.

"What is it?"

"Oh, Sherman Moss bet Allie Finston that he could play the thirteenth hole in five, in any weather. And Allie said he supposed that Sherm included darkness in his definition of weather, and Sherm said yes. So they arranged terms, and each bet a hundred, and Jim Kernochan and Frank Deering and Bob Rennesdale and Ballard Hendricks took up different ends of the bet, and out they tramped. Lanterns permitted and that's all. Rotten bet for Sherm to make. If he loses the ball, he loses a stroke, and it's a tricky hole. Don't see how he can find it once he's hit it, unless he's a wizard on direction. Even then—par is three, you know. And Sherm is no champion golfer."

Constance laughed shakily.

"Exciting, isn't it? And they're cheering as if it were all over. Let's go in, then."

One of the six men on the course must be the stranger man. And she did not wish to enter the ballroom after that stranger man had arrived there. Never before self-conscious, Constance felt that now she would be the cynosure of every eye if the stranger man were in

the ballroom when she entered it. She must be there, on the floor, if possible, dancing as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

Of course he, who had awakened her heart, would know that it was awakened; he would not think that an assumed carelessness meant that she was used to being kissed on darkened verandas by stranger men. The man who could arouse— She used the same sort of reasoning.

It was a long dance, and laughter and questions filled the latter part of it, for the six participants in the wager returned while the music yet sounded. As, close to the perfectly correct, but wearisome Bleakie, Constance had circled the floor, she had visualized the six men. She knew them all. They were all bachelors; they were all of decent family; they were all rather successful in their various lines. Oddly enough, not one of them was known to be paying anything more than casual attentions to any of the girls of Oceanside's younger set.

Constance knew them all, was on perfectly friendly though not at all intimate terms with each one of them. And one of them *must* be the stranger man. There was the faintest feeling of disappointment in admitting this. For, somehow, she wanted her "true knight" to be some one whom she had not known, whose business was unknown to her, about whom would cling some faint aura of mystery. But she dismissed this idea. Romance flowers in the least suspected places. And it wasn't what the stranger man did that counted; it was what he *was*. And he was—the man who had kissed her, whom she had kissed.

One of these six men, then, held her heart forever. That she did not know which one of them meant less than nothing. She would know when she saw him. For there was in him the magnetized metal that had drawn her,

and she would know—yes, she would know.

She permitted herself faint hopes. Sherman Moss was a doctor, a jolly chap; the least bit noisy, but that was a part of the effervescent vitality of him, the effervescent vitality that made him make a perfectly foolish wager, that might have made him, seeing a glimmer of a white gown on the dark veranda, slip off from the group, with the intention of playing some practical joke upon a spooning couple, to forget the joke in—what he had done. And though Constance did not like practical jokes—well, a vigorous, confident man must have some outlet for the energy that consumes him, and a doctor has to be so eternally on guard that once in a while he may be forgiven lapses from grave demeanor.

Moss was extremely jubilant now. He had won his bet, had made the hole in five. Yet she noticed, approvingly, that his jubilation was not of the offensive sort. It was sheer merriment at having done something the tiniest bit out of the ordinary. He would, thought Constance approvingly, have "carried on" as joyously had he lost the bet. There was nothing petty or mean about Doctor Sherman Moss.

And yet, even as she nodded to him, a little nod of invitation, she felt a certain irritation. At herself, not at him. Why couldn't she tell? If love were the all-consuming thing that it was, why was there hesitation? Why didn't love tell her at once, "This is the object, the reciprocating object, of your love?"

And while it was to Moss that she had nodded, she had observed the other men, had exchanged pleasant smiles with all of them. She had not blushed, had not lost her ease of manner. And they—all of them, including Moss—seemed unembarrassed. But that was to be expected. All of them gentlemen—there was no room for doubt of this—whoever had kissed her had not told.

Therefore, only one of them would feel inward disquiet of any sort. But—why couldn't she tell that one?

For a moment it occurred to her that the "ladylike" thing was the only thing to do—to wait, as other girls waited, until the man, in his own good time, chose to tell her the words for which her ears hungered.

But she was over thirty years of age. *Mother had been right.* She had been waiting for her own true knight, and, now that she knew he existed, she could not bear to delay. And if instinct, if the true love that bourgeoned in her heart and that bloomed for but one man, even though she did not know his face or name—if these would not tell her who he was, then—Well, upon the altar of true love one may well place sacrifice, even the sacrifice of that which is called maidenly modesty.

Sherman Moss was the one whom, at the moment, she thought she would prefer to be her true knight, of the six who held among them that personage. A little excitement that fought against a perfectly delicious calm possessed her as, in response to her smiling nod, he started toward her.

Big, virile, confident, good looking in a bold way, he passed through laughing, chaffing groups to her side. Young Bleakie promptly effaced himself. A certain eager desire to please was evident in Moss' manner. For though the young eligibles—to themselves, not to each other—characterized Conny Kee-ner as a bit of a bluestocking, there was not one of them but felt vaguely conscious of some intangible shortcoming of his own, which prevented him from measuring up to her unuttered standard of what a man should be. She rather irritated a man, at times, with her failure to appreciate mere masculinity at its true value, but she was undeniably a beauty, with her blue eyes and black hair and cream-colored skin with a hint of the rose, and her graceful figure.

And Merton Torrey so patently wanted her. It was flattering to realize that the desire of Merton Torrey wanted one.

These things were rather evident in Moss' manner as he took the chair beside her. Constance felt them to be there, in the back of his brain. And yet this diffidence, this patent desire to please, might mean anything. It might mean that this big, boldly handsome fellow was nervous about what he had done on the veranda. Of course, the true knight should have known that the lingering response of her lips to his meant only one thing, the big thing—love. And that the later repulsion, the blow, were to be forgotten, to be submerged, in the knowledge of the big thing that counted.

Yet Constance made excuses for the true knight. The blow had been so savage, so deadly in earnest; even the true knight might very well feel that he had been conceited in thinking that this girl's soul had been on her lips for him to pluck.

But if he had dared so much, if Sherman Moss were the man—certainly his look and manner showed that he would gladly have been the man—and if Constance were not to wait through weeks and months of checked desire, why—to quote one of the perfectly impossible girls who attended the settlement classes, "a gent that ain't got the nerve ought to be given some."

Doctor Moss reluctantly looked at his watch.

"A patient over at Harbor View," he announced. "Wish I could stay and have a dance with you, Miss Keener, but—"

Constance yawned daintily.

"It's rather a bore, this. I told Hammond to call for me with the car at twelve. Is it only ten now?"

Moss responded to the hint.

"May I take you home, then? I have my runabout——"

"Oh, would you? So good of you!" said Constance.

In the dressing room, she looked at herself in a mirror. Was it she, Constance Keener, who was deliberately going to—— She refused to finish the question even to herself.

It was only a half-mile run to the Keener home from the club. The last quarter mile was covered as slowly as if there had been no patient in the world awaiting Moss' ministrations, and as if they two had been in an old-fashioned buggy, instead of an up-to-the-minute, forty-horse-power roadster.

For Constance Keener was being her most bewitching self, displaying a sympathy, an understanding, a mellow comprehension that made her seem maternal in the very moment when she was most enticingly girlish. Moss lost his head completely.

His hand touched hers. She did not withdraw her fingers. He slowed down the car still more, steering with one hand. His breath came quickly, and his voice sounded harsh. His hand squeezed hers, and still she did not withdraw it. Emboldened then to the highest pitch of daring, he raised his hand and slipped it about her. He drew her to him; their lips met.

And Constance freed herself with a furious movement.

"I—I—— How dare——"

She caught herself. She must at least be fair. She was to blame.

But she did not need to shoulder it.

"Oh, my God, forgive me!" pleaded Moss. "I thought for a moment—Your hand, you know," he said accusingly.

They stopped before Constance's home. Lights shone upon them both. Her eyes were brave as they met his.

"I'm sorry," she said gravely. "It was my fault. I shouldn't have—— I don't flirt, doctor. A moment that—I'm very sorry. Let's forget it."

"I wish I could hope to," he said mis-

erably. "I always wanted— Tonight, somehow, I almost believed— It was too big, and yet—"

"You'll forgive me?" she queried softly.

"You're an angel! Will you forgive me?"

"Not only that, but I'll *forget* it," said Constance.

Her meaning was very clear. It was that Moss must forget, too. And the doctor took his congé bravely. After all, he had never, before to-night, really dreamed of aspiring to Constance Keener, and—he'd get over it. Quickly. Both of them were aware of this.

Constance hurried up the veranda steps. Before the door was opened to her, she scrubbed at her lips with a lacy handkerchief. Moss was not the stranger man. That much she had known the moment his lips had touched hers. But why—why—why couldn't instinct tell her before her lips had been—ugh!—soiled?

"Did mother's little girl have a nice time? Oh, but she didn't. She has returned so early. She missed Merton, didn't she, dear?"

Constance was rarely snippy with her mother, and was never vulgar. Tonight she was both. She remembered what she had heard a young cousin saying about a boyish enemy.

"No, I didn't miss Merton, mother," she said. "I—I—hate his—insides!"

"Darling! Mother's little—"

But Constance, in a white heat of fury, was in her room, with the door locked.

To have Merton Torrey's name mentioned on a night that had held all of life for her! It was—well, it was a whole lot worse than having been kissed, after the perfect kiss of the stranger man, by Sherman Moss. For Moss' kiss had been simply physiological, after all, and had not seemed to soil her as had the mention of Torrey's name. Odd, but true.

In an anger that she knew was unreasonable, she sat down at her desk and wrote a letter to Merton Torrey, definitely declining his offer of marriage. What were ten or eighty millions beside the stranger man?

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Keener had, of course, not been unaware of Constance's temper. And Mrs. Keener had one panacea for all ailments of the mind, body, or heart—a bright little chat.

She brought it up with Constance's breakfast tray.

"I knew you'd feel tired this morning," she chirruped, "so I brought up your breakfast."

"Oh-h, mother!" Constance sighed. "My head aches. Won't you please let me—"

Mrs. Keener beamed upon her daughter.

"Mother knows; mother understands," she said. "But if you'd just eat a little—"

Oh, well, what could one do, Constance asked herself. When Mrs. Keener was determined to radiate joy, there was no stopping her. So Constance dutifully attacked the lamb chop, the rolls, and the coffee, not forgetting the fruit. Languidly at first, but soon with the keen appetite of a healthy body and—though certain qualms of conscience, of maidenly self-reproach, had kept her awake a good part of the night—of a healthy mind, too.

Mrs. Keener drew up a chair beside her daughter's bed and plumped her portly person down upon it.

"There! I knew breakfast would make you feel better." She folded her hands in her lap and swayed gently back and forth.

"Mother," said Constance, with sudden determination, "Mr. Torrey has proposed and I—I've refused him. I've

written to him, and I'm going to mail the letter this morning."

For a moment Mrs. Keener's whole body sagged. Her lower jaw dropped. But brightness of heart, of the Mrs. Keener brand, is akin to fatalism. Fatalism teaches that what is must be, and that what is going to be must be. Brightness of heart teaches that what is isn't, and that what is going to be mustn't be; it has the ostrichlike tendency of refusing to look at facts. And Mrs. Keener was the brightest little heart in the county. She believed in brightness; it was her religion. She even recounted, as an example of what brightness will do for one, how her husband had smiled with apparent cheerfulness ten seconds before he died. Constance at times understood her father's smile. But she knew that he had not been a bright heart while life had seemed certain.

And so now Mrs. Keener rallied.

"Ah, but you haven't mailed the letter, have you?" She noted—even bright hearts sense things at times—that Constance's mouth was hard. But one does not give up one's creed at the first assault, or even the first defeat. "And even if you do mail the letter—ah, well, faint heart never won fair lady, and Merton is no faint heart. You'll love him the more when you realize his perfect faith, his tenacity, his steadfast love, his—"

"Mother! For Heaven's sake, go, will you?"

There is no wrath quite like the wrath of a daughter toward her mother. Brightness was dimmed for a moment. Mortally affronted—when one brings cheer and it is rejected, one has a right to marvel on the ingratitude of humans, especially daughters—Mrs. Keener, with dignity, withdrew.

Constance stared at the breakfast dishes on the low table beside her bed. She had a desire, happily conquered, to kick the table over, to hurl the dishes

against the walls, to do many inutile things. Instead, she got out of bed and into a cold bath. Half an hour later, she was dressed; even her temper had become garbed in the apparel of restraint.

In the orderly living room, she found her mother. Mrs. Keener was "putting to rights" things that had not been at "wrongs." She was bustling about with that aggressively offensive industry of the woman aggrieved. Constance knew it was hopeless. Nevertheless, because her mother's feelings *were* hurt, the daughter felt that she ought to salve them.

"Will you go to a matinée with me this afternoon, mother?" she queried.

Mrs. Keener stared at her with the air of one who has heard an amazing sacrilege.

"On a Wednesday?" she ejaculated. "When I have to go over the laundry items and—"

"Mary can attend to that, mother."

"Do you think I'd let a servant be trusted with Irish Jace?"

"You often have let her, you know."

"Then if I've been remiss in my duty, it's time I mended my ways," said Mrs. Keener stiffly. "And with so many household duties to attend to, and it requiring every minute of my time —" She stared belligerently at Constance.

"Don't look at me that way," said Constance sharply. "You know perfectly well that whenever I've offered to help—*tried* to help—you've got rid of me somehow. You *love* work!"

"Surely you don't censure me for that," replied Mrs. Keener. "Home is sacred to me, and if my daughter had some of my ideas, she'd not be so restless and unhappy and unwilling to accept good advice. When I was a girl, I listened to everything my dear mother told me, and by following her wise counsel, I found happiness."

"Mother," said Constance, "did you ever listen to your own heart?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean. If you mean did I think that every whim and idle humor I had must be heeded, no, I did not. I was taught that my mother knew more about me than I did, and knew what was best for me."

"Well, perhaps *your* mother did," agreed Constance.

It was useless to attempt to "make up." When Mrs. Keener bussed her hands unnecessarily, it meant that she was merely biding the moment when she could still her hands and turn loose her tongue. Wherefore, having extended the olive branch and had it rejected, Constance was through. And before reproach and its necessary concomitant, tears, could descend upon her, Constance fled the house.

The ten-seventeen to the city was undoubtedly the worst train of the day. It was a local, stopping everywhere. But to-day Constance was glad of its delays, for they gave her time to think.

And there was much to think about, even though, in her sleepless hours of last night, she had thought until she had feared her brain would burst.

She was going to find out which one of the six men upon the golf course last night had kissed her! She was going to find out as immediately as possible. Blush though she might at the manner in which she had invited the caress of Doctor Moss last night, she was willing to blush again—and again—and if need be again! To be kissed by any but the stranger man would be distasteful; more than that—it would be appalling. But life, Constance had suddenly learned, is brief. One is foolish to delay happiness a second. And if happiness may be gained by braving temporary unpleasantnesses, let them be braved.

But fortune would not continue to be as—well, "kind" was hardly the

word to describe the incident of Doctor Moss—fortuitous! Fortune would not be fortuitous. There was no dance scheduled for to-night from which she might be taken home by another of the half dozen of the golf course. And since Constance could not wait upon fortuity—But she couldn't brazenly call at the offices or the homes of the five men who were left since the labial elimination of Moss.

What could she do, then, except hope? But hope, expectation, patient waiting—they all meant the same thing; they were maidenly, and—well, after thirty, and after being touched to the very core of one's soul, to be maidenly is to set back the clock, and Constance wished to set it ahead.

Yet she was hemmed in, circumscribed, by the very conventions that the stranger man and she herself had set aside for one wonderful moment. She could not go to each or any of the five "suspects" and ask boldly:

"Did you kiss me last night?"

And yet was that any more revolting to a girl of nice instincts, was it one-tenth as revolting as it would be to continue doing as she had done with Moss last night? To a truly maidenly girl, it was not! But—it was ridiculous, and there are few sins that most of us will not commit to avoid even the appearance of being ridiculous.

But when the train pulled into the station, Constance was no further along toward a solution of the great question—how? And because she had decided on no method of approach, the white envelope in her hand, addressed to Merton Torrey, received all her baffled anger. She didn't drop it into a letter box. She jammed it in. And somehow the little, vicious push gave her relief. There! *That* was settled, anyway!

It was half past eleven, and—she had no plan in view. She had merely escaped from mother. And she didn't

feel like calling upon any friends. She went to the settlement house near Washington Square.

A group of female gunmen were being initiated into the mysteries of baking Parker House rolls. Madge Carney, the efficient chief worker, waved a floury hand of welcome.

"Take charge of those four girls, there's a darling, will you?" she demanded. "You'll find an apron in the closet and—"

Too busy for more words, Miss Carney turned back to the six chattering students by the bread board. Constance gladly found the apron and for thirty minutes won the sort of content that comes from being too busily engaged with the hands to do much thinking. Measuring, sifting, resifting, stirring, all the while explaining to her four pupils, Constance was sorry when the dough was put away to rise.

"Anything else I can do, Madge?" she asked.

"You can stay to luncheon, like a ducky, if you will," Madge replied.

"Done," said Constance.

"No loafing here," said Madge. "Set the table, there's a dear."

So Constance, still in her befouled apron, went into the dining room, where she was too much occupied to note, a moment later, a ring at the front-door bell, or the chattering of surprised greeting.

She had just placed a dish upon the table, glanced at it, decided that it was dusty, and returned to the butler's pantry for another, when she became suddenly conscious of a presence near at hand. She had heard no footsteps; hardly realized that she heard repressed breathing. And before she could turn, she felt arms about her. The twisting of her head brought her face against the avid mouth of a man.

But the hunger left his lips almost as they touched hers. She was curiously aware, even as he released her, even as

she struggled for indignant words, that he was almost as chagrined as she.

And it was Bob Rennesdale, one of the golf-course sextet! As she recognized him, indignation died within her. She was conscious of a deep gratitude toward him. One-fifth of the embarrassment, the humiliating shame that she had conjured up before her mental eyes this morning was over with; over with in a manner for which she could not possibly be held blameworthy. And so she was not angry, nor could she summon a semblance of anger. Instead, her eyes twinkled and her mouth corners curled the least bit.

"Does the scullery maid usually say, 'Thank you, sir?'" she queried mockingly.

"Oh, gee!" said Rennesdale mournfully. "I beg your pardon, Miss Keener. I'm awfully sorry. I—I thought it was Madge—I mean, I thought—" He stared at her in helpless embarrassment.

"You thought it was *Madge*?" Somehow Constance had never thought of Madge Carney, efficiency personified, as being of the sort to whom loverly dalliance would at all appeal. Constance was learning things, not alone about herself. "So you and Madge are—"

"We aren't anything," said Rennesdale glumly. "I—I want to be—something to her, but I've never been able to get up my nerve, and when she let me in just now, and said she'd be back in a moment, and I heard the dishes in here, I thought it was she, and I tiptoed from the reception room, and saw the apron— It's just like the apron she has on," he accused.

"The package is done up the same, but the contents"—Constance rubbed her chin with her knuckles—"the contents are ever so different, aren't they?"

"It's a dandy package, and the contents are bully," said Rennesdale, "but it isn't what I ordered."

Constance smiled. She looked Rennesdale over approvingly. The young architect was so sober-minded, apparently so devoid of any lightsome frivolity of speech, that his answer surprised her. She felt toward him a big sisterliness that she had never felt toward a man before. Not the slightest resentment did she feel that he, who had known her so many years, should have looked beyond her at the figure of Madge Carney. She wondered, in this sudden feeling of intimacy with him, if she would dare to ask him if he knew, or suspected, the identity of the stranger man.

"Tell me," she said impulsively, "on the golf course last night—were you all together? Did you separate at all?"

The change of subject bewildered Rennesdale. Yet he answered:

"Yes, we did separate. Couldn't find lanterns, and each one of us was dead sure he knew where they were, and we rummaged all through the locker and dressing rooms downstairs. Why?"

But Constance evaded the question. The locker and dressing rooms took up all the basement floor of the Oceanside Club save that part occupied by the heating plant. Any one of the six men—four now—might easily have emerged from the door that Constance now remembered to be almost directly under the spot where she had leaned against the veranda rail. No room for doubt; one of the remaining four was the blessedly guilty stranger man.

"How long, young man, have you—cherished for Madge the—er—" She laughed at him.

"Torrey—Merton Torrey—you know him," and it was Rennesdale's turn to smile, "got talking with me at the club, one night, learned that I was an architect, pulled some wires, and got me commissioned to plan the changes that were made here a few months ago—you remember—and I met Madge, and — Gee, Miss Keener, I've got to

wait a million years before I get up my nerve again, and—"

"Oh, so you're in here, are you?" Madge Carney spoke from the dining-room door. She advanced into the room. "Well, Bob Rennesdale, you have your nerve, haven't you? Why aren't you in the reception room, where you belong?"

She was so matter-of-fact in her words to the architect that Constance, in her new-found knowledge of the heart and its mysteries, could understand Bob's lack of "nerve." Where the firm ice of friendship has formed, it is often difficult to break through to the warmer springs of love. No man is so handicapped in his love-making as he who is looked upon as a chum, as a pal. For the object of his affections, once it is fixed in her mind that chumship is all that exists, is deaf to the sounds, blind to the signs, of the warmer feeling.

And Constance came to a sudden decision.

"He's been kissing me," she announced.

Madge Carney raised her eyebrows in surprise at the poor taste of the jest. Then her eyes alighted upon the crimson, agonized face of Rennesdale. Over her own features ran a hot blush. Into her eyes there leaped a look of pain, of wondering. And before it could change to outraged anger, Constance spoke again:

"You see, Madge, Bob thought that I was you, and—and—" She ran lightly over to Madge and took her by the shoulders. She propelled her toward the anguished Rennesdale. "Children," she said, "my blessing, and I insist that you— Bob, must I hold her for you? Can't you hold her yourself? Can't you summon up your nerve for just one blessed min—"

She gave Madge a final push. Rennesdale summoned his nerve. Constance, tears in her eyes and a singing

in her heart, ran from the room. She was generous enough not to feel the slightest hurt when, as she passed the dining-room door a moment later, her apron doffed and her hat donned, no call for her to remain to luncheon came from either of the persons now so engrossed in each other.

She was glad, glad, glad, that dear Madge Carney had "found a husband." She remembered how she had always thought of Madge as not the marrying kind—thought of her rather condescendingly as the sort of girl who had no attraction, beyond that of a free-and-easy good-fellowship, for men. And now she knew better. She knew that a very decent chap, a man whom she would have married herself had fate happened to have made him the stranger man, loved Madge dearly and wanted her. She felt toward the stranger man a something that was different from the warm love that possessed her—a feeling of friendliness, of chumminess. Somehow she felt that he had played a part in bringing Bob Rennesdale to the side of Madge Carney. For if Constance had not been awakened last night to the love craving in herself, she would not have had the ability to read the heart of Madge Carney, would not have known what Madge had not known herself—that beneath her friendship for Rennesdale was passion.

Constance had aged, in knowledge, immeasurably since that kiss on the veranda. She was as wise as could be. Did love, or having loved, give one a super-wisdom? Did it give one the ability to read the hidden hearts of others? No, after all, it must be accident, for her mother had loved her father deeply. And Mrs. Keener was merely a sentimental old lady, with a kind heart and a firm belief in romance that even her very prosaic husband had never been able to destroy. For Mr. Keener had been prosaic, Constance admitted to herself. In fact, every man

she knew was prosaic, except—the stranger man. And really, looking over mentally the field that remained, and from which the stranger man must be drawn—well, appearances were deceptive. The stranger man *was* romantic; not after the silly, schoolgirl ideal, but in the fact that his heart possessed a capacity to thrill.

Constance suddenly discovered that she had left her cardcase at the settlement house. She wouldn't go back for it, but some of those girls might possibly— She telephoned Madge. A tremulous voice answered her. Constance explained about the missing case.

"Yes, I will, dear," said Madge. "And why didn't you stay? Oh, Conny, isn't he the dearest, darlingest—Conny, he wants me to be married right away. Of course I simply can't think of it, even. Wants to be married *today!* I've told him that I wouldn't dream of such a thing for months and months and months. It would look so sort of—I don't know exactly, but wouldn't it?"

"Madge," said Constance, "if you don't marry him *this minute*, you're a little fool and ought to be spanked!"

"I know it, dear," said Madge surprisingly. "And Bob—he's going away to-night. A commission in Dallas, Texas. He'll be gone three months. Won the municipal-building contest for architects there, and—and— Oh, I don't know, I don't know!" she almost wailed.

"What don't you know?" demanded Constance severely. "Whether you love him or not?"

"Oh, *that*, of course!" replied Madge. "But—but—would you think it dreadful of me if I did, Conny?"

"I'll think it dreadful if you don't, you goose!"

"Then—then—will you— Oh, there're a million things to do, and Bob has things to do, and—and—would you go with me? And would you get hold

of Albert Funston or Jim Kernochan or Frank Deering or Ballard Hendricks for Bob? He must have a best man, and you—you'll come, and— Oh, I'm so glad you telephoned! I didn't know what I should do—how to get hold of you, and I didn't want any one else, and—"

"And you intended to be married today, anyway? Bully for you, Madge! I'll attend to the best-man business. Though I never heard of a woman being asked to do such a thing before. Go back to your billing and cooing. Oh—what shopping, Madge? Tell me. I'd *love* to do it."

"Conny, I've everything, but—Conny, I haven't a single pair of stockings in the world that haven't holes in the toes, and—"

"Enough! What time shall I meet you, and where?"

"The Little Church Around the Corner at eight."

"Goodness me, but you're prompt! Has Bob the license?"

"No, but he's telephoned a clerk that he knows, and—"

"Little reluctant, shy Madge!"

"Conny! If you felt—"

"There, dear, I know."

"Oh, you don't! You couldn't! You have to feel it! You have to—Conny, of course it was an accident, and it's helped me to my happiness, and I'm awfully glad it happened, but—but—"

"No, dearest, it was only my chin. He was rattled and his aim was bad."

"Oh!" Constance grinned at the relief that was in Madge's tones. "But how did you know what—what I meant?" demanded Madge.

"It was so hard to guess!" mocked Constance. "But, Madge—really, I wouldn't have minded if he had, you know, and when Ballard Hendricks or whoever I dig up kisses the bride, perhaps I'll—"

"Conny, I hate you!"

"Madge, I love you."

"And, Conny, I love you!"

"Sh-sh, my child, you've no room for me. Bob takes it all. Eight o'clock. It shall be done, girly, if I have to sandbag the best man. Go to your man, now, and kiss him."

And Constance hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER IV.

The knot was tied by eight-fifteen. Ballard Hendricks was best man, and Constance was the only woman present besides the bride. It had happened that the first man Constance had telephoned to was Ballard Hendricks, and in his office, prepared to go to luncheon with him, had been Allie Funston, Frank Deering, and Jim Kernochan. And all of them had attended the brief little ceremony. Constance had dined with the bride-to-be and accompanied the couple to the church, where the others were awaiting them. And now the deed was done.

Through the clatter of congratulations the groom made himself heard.

"And now supper," he said.

Constance hesitated. The new Mrs. Rennesdale blushed prettily.

"Aren't I a good enough chaperon, Conny?" she asked. "I'm a married woman."

Constance envied Madge the blush and the statement. How similar, in a way, were their two situations! A man had kissed Constance, and she had known, in an illuminating moment, that he was the one man in the world for her. Madge had been told that Rennesdale had kissed Constance, and in the moment of the telling, Madge had known that she loved Rennesdale. Up to that moment, Madge had not guessed her love. It had come to her from clear skies. Very similar indeed. Except that Madge had won joy almost immediately after the discovery of her love, while Constance—

A sudden reaction possessed Constance; she would have begged off from the supper had she not feared to cloud, though ever so slightly, Madge's happiness on this greatest day of Madge's life. For seeing Madge in possession of a happiness so complete, and knowing that Madge had gone to Bob with virgin lips, there came to Constance, herself virgin of lips until last night, a wish to be as she had been. Madge had waited, waited smilingly, cheerfully, without thinking what she was waiting for, without knowing it. Perhaps that was the best way. But then, of course, Madge had not known herself to be in love! That made a difference.

But did it?

Yet there is something so conventional about marriage that seeing it happen to some one else arouses within us all our conventionalities. The Constance of great daring, who had pushed aside convention, who had been going to meet and know her "true knight" without delay, and who had not been going to endure meekly and patiently the harrying time of waiting—that Constance disappeared when the minister finished the simple little ceremony that made Bob Rennesdale and Madge Carney man and wife.

Constance asked herself what Madge would have done had she known the state of her own heart. Undoubtedly she would have flirted a little, would have shown Bob that advances he might wish to make would not be repulsed, but—that was all.

After all, human beings are human beings. Men are men and women are women. A man is like the bee; he can fly from flower to flower, sipping until the right one is found. But woman—it is not mere poetry to say that she is a flower. For convention, which is, after all, but the safeguards of nature altered by the race to suit varying times and situations, has decreed that woman play

the flower's part. It is all very well to protest against this, to say that it is wrong, unjust. Nevertheless, protest will not alter human nature. And masculine human nature is so constituted that it takes alarm at the first advance made by the fairer sex. Man is not complimented that a woman should seek him. He wonders what's the matter with the woman; and when a man begins to wonder what is wrong with a woman, he tries to find out, and the bloom is rubbed from the blossom by defiling hands.

Reflections like these passed through Constance's brain as she watched the new-wed couple. The flower, rooted to the soil, that cannot seek the bee, but must await him—this was woman's part, and Constance would play it. For the wild ideas that had seethed within her seemed foreign to her now, to be a part of a Constance whom she did not know and could not respect, a Constance who was not the Constance that she had known for thirty years.

And yet she was glad that, of the six, two had been eliminated. Among these four was her "true knight," and she was puzzled that none of them, at a moment like this when a man's sentimental side is most prominent, should, by word or even glance, intimate to her that he was in the secret of the veranda.

Man was a strange creature. But she forced down the impulses, unruly and, she had now decided, unworthy. If the man of the four who was the stranger man did not choose to disclose his identity as yet, she would do nothing to make him do so. Though happiness was lost to each moment of delay, the happiness that would certainly come would make up for the loss.

She was demure at the supper that followed the wedding. It was not until toward the end of the meal that her heart began to beat with the irregularity that had characterized its actions since last night. For Bob Rennesdale, re-

sponding to a toast to the groom, offered a toast to the next among his guests who would join the great army of the married.

And to Constance's amazement, blushes appeared on the faces of Hendricks, Deering, and Funston. Renesdale noted them, too.

"What? All three of you?" he cried.

And then and there it came out that Hendricks, Funston, and Deering were engaged, that they all expected to be married within a few months. And they were none of them engaged to Oceanside girls, which explained why no rumors of their impending fates had been wasted through that suburban town.

Alone was left Kernochan. Constance tried to keep herself from blushing. For Kernochan was the stranger man! These other three, almost simpering in their embarrassment—none of these had been the stranger man, the "true knight." Impossible! Shorn of the glamour that mystery had cloaked them in, they were, to Constance's eyes now, simply three ordinary young men, hard-working, prosaic, doomed to get married to prosaic young women, to settle down into prosaic husbands and fathers. They seemed to shrink, compared to Kernochan, and Kernochan seemed to take on added stature, to be mentally above these other men.

Constance's demureness increased. It was hard not to be provocative, but provocative, inviting, she had sworn not to be. She tried to detach herself, mentally, from the party, to be a looker-on. And, seeming to succeed, she felt that Jim Kernochan was paying her an ocular attention unjustified by the casualness of their acquaintance. Also, he seemed to be hanging on her words, to have an undercurrent of meaning, for her alone, in the ordinary things he said.

Far from extraordinary, considering that he was the stranger man, but—

Constance was rather surprised that, knowing him for what he was, she managed to keep her feelings under control. She had thought that when she should become certain of his identity, she would want to cry her love aloud. But, instead, as she became increasingly conscious of his close attention, shyness possessed her.

The party broke up at ten. At least, Constance signified to Madge the necessity of her catching the ten-twenty-nine.

"Now, boys, don't crowd," said Renesdale, "but which one of you—"

Kernochan was the first to speak. Constance pointed out to him that she had frequently returned home as late as this, alone; that it was unnecessary for any of them to consider her. But Kernochan insisted and, pleasurable, she yielded. The others remained to escort the bride and groom, a little later, to their train.

"Rather makes a person think, doesn't it?" said Kernochan, as they settled into their seats on the ten-twenty-nine.

Constance looked at him. She wondered if Kernochan were leading up to—well, to what he might be expected to lead up to, considering the matter of the veranda. And save for that blissful moment last night, she had never been so close to Kernochan before. Oddly enough, she now remembered, she had never danced with Kernochan. The young broker—he was in a well-known firm on Pine Street—had been, if anything, less acquainted with her than any of the others. So much the better; there was so much more for them to learn—delightfully—about each other.

And that what she, at any rate, would learn would be to his credit, she had no doubt. She took in the firm jaw, the strong nose, the lean body. Intensely masculine—that was the effect he produced; a man who would rule his

household, who would achieve mastery even where he won love. Strong!

Yesterday, before the dance, Constance had been full of ideas about partnership. Marriage, to be perfect, must be a perfect partnership, with each giving so far as self-respect—which meant, analyzed, the respect of the other partner—would permit, each demanding as self-respect insisted.

But to-night, though she tried to feel as casual as she knew she seemed, tried to be sensible, she knew that she had no wish to claim anything—ever. She would merely want to give all.

But she had made her determination. She would await the moment when Kernochan chose to declare himself; she would not invite the disclosure by anything more than permitting him to pay her attention if he chose. But she could discount that "if" by being as charming as she knew how. And if, without exerting herself, she had already won him, how long would it take her, *trying*, to bring him, as mother would say, to the point?

Not very long, she thought confidently.

"Think? How do you mean?" she parried.

"Oh, the seriousness of it all," he answered vaguely.

"You dread it as much as that?" She hated her own banality.

"I?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm beyond that. But if I ever—ask a woman to give herself to me, I'll know that *I'm* giving myself to her. It will be an equal bargain."

"And don't you think that Bob is giving as well as Madge?" demanded Constance, shocked.

"Oh, Lord, I didn't mean to have you draw conclusions. I wasn't thinking of the bride and groom. I was simply thinking of marriage *as* marriage. No specific case."

"But your generality must be

founded on something specific," said Constance. "Isn't it?"

"Of course, but not on any *particular* specific case. On so many that I've observed. One learns a little here and a little more there. One finds one husband selfish in this thing and another selfish in another thing. Between them, they're selfish in everything. And—and—when there's selfishness in one thing, it's only natural to assume that there's selfishness in others. A looker-on can't tell all about any particular couple. But by observing several couples, seeing as much as he can, he comes to the conclusion that what he sees in all he could find in one were he given opportunity."

"And you blame men for marital unhappiness?"

"Oh, I don't *blame* any one! I simply happen to see how it is, and—that's what I meant by saying that I'd know that I wasn't merely accepting, but giving myself."

"Then you do think that men accept more than they give? That's the woman's point of view, isn't it?"

Kernochan pondered this.

"Well, maybe, but—if the average man knew how to think, to reason, and then studied the proposition, I think he'd agree with the woman's point of view. You see—how often does the man make the wife's interests his? Isn't it the other way round? In the most perfect marriages that we know of?"

"Now, most men think that they repay that submerging of the wife's interests in the man's—I'm talking of the rare perfect marriages we know of—by devotion, by attention, by consideration, by kindness. These are all that a man *can* give. But the woman—not only has she given these things, but she's submerged herself. It's all very well to say that the twain are one, with identical interests. It sounds pretty, and in the perfect marriages we know of, it works well. But perfect as those mar-

riages may be—and we know how rare they are—there is not an equality of giving. The woman has given her identity, and the man—well, he never gives that."

"Wouldn't you be the first to call him henpecked if he did?" queried Constance.

"If she gave, too? How could I?"

"But is it possible? Mustn't one be the leader?"

"As society is constituted, as convention has ruled that marriage shall be, I suppose that's so."

"Is it convention? Isn't it nature? Aren't there two distinct parts for man and woman to play? *Can* a man give as much as a woman?"

"Not now. But some day—oh, I know a man can't give himself as the woman does. I put it wrongly. What I meant was that I'd want to give myself as thoroughly as she did. Wanting to, being willing to, the fact that marriage, as it is, prevented me from doing it—I'd feel that I'd done all that was possible. And I'd make her feel it, too."

"And you think that the reason why so many marriages are—well, what they are, is because the man isn't willing, doesn't want to give as much?"

"It's because he never thinks of it," answered Kernochan. "Woman is, in the main, sensible enough. She doesn't expect the impossibilities. But she wants to know that the man to whom she has given all frets at those impossibilities and wants to give them to her—at least, recognizes the existence of the impossible things. It's the history of the race. Always the lover has set himself tasks for his beloved. To-day it's the prosaic, but necessary task of supporting her. A few centuries ago it was killing the Saracens for her greater glory. To be his inspiration was enough for any woman. Now when a woman knows that she is her husband's inspiration, the marriage is

perfect. But unfortunately, even as, in the days of alleged chivalry, the men fought the Saracens for love of their lady, who held her image before their eyes—even as they were rare enough to make names in history as perfect lovers, so are the men to-day whose wives are their inspiration rare."

"But if the man provides, works—isn't that proof that the woman is his inspiration?" objected Constance.

He laughed dryly.

"Do you think so? After observing the couples you know?"

Constance was silent.

"Custom, what is expected of them, what they *have* to do, too often. That's what it is. The whole idea is wrong. Man is paramount. People pretend—really believe—that nature so meant it to be—that the woman is born for sacrifice, born to give all and receive what she may. But I don't think so. And some day—But the millennium isn't here, is it?" he finished lightly.

Constance observed his profile, gloomy now. This was the ideal lover; he was everything that she had known the man who drew her heart to her lips, last night on the veranda, had been. He was the man who would be lover always, husband only incidentally; thus, the perfect mate.

Romantic as he sounded, he did not sound gushing, a sentimentalist. He sounded *fair*. And though she was only thirty, not Solomon's age, she knew enough to know that absolute fairness between man and woman is the rarest thing extant, and so the finest basis for a perfect marriage.

Gloomy and stern his profile was. Did he—she thrilled—did he worship her so utterly, was he so afraid of last night's daring's result upon their relations, did she know his identity, that he abased himself before her? She wanted to tell him that there was no need for abasement, that he had not

offended her, that she loved him with every fiber of her being.

A few hours ago she would have done so. But reaction had set in permanently. It is possible to throw off the shackles of life for a little while, but not for any sustained period. Pride enters into the equation. Advanced though Constance had long considered herself, more than advanced as she had been in thought and intention this morning, the ceremony that she had just witnessed had brought her back to the present. Among the many things men prized was maidenliness. Even a great love, an overwhelming love, might, in moments of coolness, remember the lack of maidenliness.

And something else prevented her from telling him that she knew he was the stranger man, and that the blow she had struck was not the act of the real Constance, but had been convention acting through her.

That something else was this: Secure in the knowledge that Kernochan was the stranger man, secure in the thought that his was the perfect love and nothing less, she felt the desire to avow herself, to be the recipient of avowals, less urgent. Knowledge was enough; confession, admission, could wait.

"Well," she said, with an attempt at a laugh, "the millennium isn't here, but Oceanside is."

The train stopped. Public conveyances were plentiful, and as Constance had not telephoned for the car to meet her, she thought of hiring one of these.

"It's only half a mile. Mayn't we walk?" asked Kernochan.

"Fun," said Constance.

And so they walked.

But the change from the train to the countryside brought a change in their subject of conversation. They discussed Rennesdale and Madge. They talked about the engagements of the other three men. It was not until they

reached Constance's door that either referred to their talk on the train.

"Hope you don't consider me an amazing idiot, Miss Keener," he said.

"Not at all," she smiled. "I think you're most interesting. I only wonder how you happen to feel so strongly on the matter. You must have given marriage a great deal of thought."

"Well, I ought to. I've been married nine years," he answered bitterly.

Constance stared at him. She only prayed that the electric lights would not betray the asheness of her face, that her knees would uphold her until he had gone.

Speech she had none. There was nothing to say. Reproaches, contempt—she didn't feel them. She only felt that the props upon which all of life rested had been knocked down.

She never knew just what she said to Kernochan or how he said good night. She only knew that the door was finally, after many years, opened, and that she entered her own house, and that, thank a generous God, her mother had gone to bed.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Keener wanted a serious talk with her daughter. At breakfast, to which Constance descended, although a sleepless night had drawn circles under her eyes, Mrs. Keener greeted her daughter with an icy politeness that was alarming. Further, Mrs. Keener was as fully dressed as if she intended paying some morning calls. This was a sure sign of bad temper, for Mrs. Keener never, under any consideration, left her own home in the morning, never received calls in the morning, and considered that a rather slovenly dishabille was excused by the fact that there was "so much to do." "So much to do" usually meant inefficient interference with the work of the capable maids. And being neatly attired at

breakfast meant that Mrs. Keener had decided to assume a brisk, no-nonsense manner. She felt that she looked more authoritative when carefully dressed. Though she did not realize it, she was the sort of person who relies upon apparel to lend the character a strength foreign to it.

The morning repast over, Mrs. Keener signified her wish that her daughter would accompany her to the library. Meekly, Constance followed the imposingly corseted figure, wondering that one as broken-hearted as herself should have such a keen eye for the ridiculous, should be stifling an inclination to laugh.

"Now, Constance," began Mrs. Keener, "it's time that we came to an understanding."

"Yes, mother. About what?"

"About your life," replied her mother severely.

"Doesn't that concern me more than any one else? Need there be any understanding, as you term it?"

"Don't sneer at your own mother," said Mrs. Keener.

Constance sighed.

"Get it over with, please, mother. I suppose it's about Mr. Torrey."

"It is. Did you mail your letter to him?"

"I did."

"Then may I ask what you propose to do with yourself?"

"You'd better explain, mother."

"I will. You understand, don't you, that your father left all his property to me? That you are dependent upon me for everything?"

Constance rose.

"I don't think that we need talk any more, mother. Your idea is to—what? Turn me out if I don't accept Mr. Torrey?"

"I think that my great love for my only child should be understood by her, so that she shouldn't say such foolish things, such heartless things!"

"Well, what is the plan?" demanded Constance.

"I had hoped to reason with you, to appeal to your good sense, to your respect for your mother's older and wiser judgment. But I see that's useless," said Mrs. Keener bitterly. "No, Constance, I hope that I shall never be cruel to my only child. But there is a duty that a mother owes her child. I have been remiss in my duty. Had I exacted obedience from you always, you would not refuse it to me now."

Still standing, Constance looked down upon her mother. Her lips curled faintly. Constance knew her mother pretty well. She knew just how much duty Mrs. Keener had felt toward her "only child." Disappointed because she was not to be the mother-in-law of one of the richest men of New York, Mrs. Keener was simply being unpleasant. She was one of those numerous persons who think that being tyrannical is being just, who think of "duty" only when their own wishes have been thwarted, who have the sort of conscience that forbids them to do a mean thing unless they have evoked from their own desires a pious excuse.

"Well, go ahead, mother. Don't let your great natural love for me prevent you from performing your duty."

Mrs. Keener flushed.

"When you were a young girl, I hoped that your restlessness would wear off in time. As you tried one outlet after another for your energy, I thought that sooner or later you would tire of it all, would understand that a woman is happiest when she's playing the part for which nature has fitted her. But I was wrong. By permitting you to have your own will, to fritter away your time, I let you develop a spirit of unreasonableness, of contempt for authority. And now, when you have an opportunity such as is granted to very few, when love, wealth, and position are within your reach—had I brought

you up differently, you would feel differently toward this wonderful opportunity. I am to blame in great measure. But my weakness is over. You have had your own way too long. You have been permitted a freedom that in my youth was not accorded to married women, even. And freedom has done you no good. It has harmed you; it has made you think lightly of the vital things of life—marriage, the home, children."

"Yes, mother," said Constance, as Mrs. Keener paused. "And you are going—"

"I am going, for your own good, Constance, to restrict your freedom. I am going to cut down your allowance, to insist that you spend more time at home, to insist that you follow your mother's advice."

"And if I refuse?"

"I don't think you'll do much running around on the dollar a week that I'm going to allow you, Constance. It costs just that for the round trip to the city. Of course I shall pay for your clothing, as usual, but I'll select it myself and have it charged. Well, what have you to say?"

But Constance had nothing to say at the moment to her mother. She sat down at a desk and lifted the telephone upon it. As if her mother were in another room, for all the attention she paid to her, Constance asked for a number and got it.

"Mrs. Carey? This is Constance Keener. Yes, thank you, very well. Remember speaking to me about a nursery governess? Yes, I think I have the very person for you. 'No, don't engage any one yet. To-night possibly; to-morrow certainly. Not at all, Mrs. Carey. So glad to be able—Good-by."

She hung up and turned to her mother.

"I've read father's will, mother," she said evenly, "especially the clause which

says, 'I leave nothing to my daughter, Constance, because I well know that her mother understands that I wish my daughter to have what I should give her, and I know that she will justly and generously execute my wish.'"

"Your father wanted me to exercise my judgment, to do what is right—"

"It's time I had a bank account, mother," interrupted Constance. "I want you to write me a check for twenty-five hundred dollars. You've been giving me fifteen dollars a week and paying for my clothing. I prefer to pay for my clothing myself. I want twenty-five hundred a year, and I want the first year's allowance now. If you don't give it to me at once, I shall become nursery governess to the Carey children to-day."

Mrs. Keener stared at her daughter. She knew well enough that Constance would do as she said. And Mrs. Carey—the upstart—would probably be delighted to have Constance in her employ, not so much because of Constance's ability, but because it would annoy Constance's mother so greatly. Mrs. Keener's daughter a servant!

The clash of wills lasted exactly ten seconds. Somehow Mrs. Keener knew that this was not a time for tears, for reproaches. She wrote the check.

Constance folded it up and put it into her pocketbook.

"I'm going into town, mother," she stated coldly. "I don't know when I shall return."

"You mean that—you may be gone—all night?"

"Possibly all year," answered Constance.

"But you can't— It isn't— I won't permit—"

"Mother, you've done your best to make me marry a man for whom I don't care. You've treated me like a child. You must learn that I'm a grown woman. And the only way I can teach you that is by acting like one. I resent

your attitude, your threats. I'm showing you my resentment as I would show it to a stranger!"

"But I'm your mother! I'm not a stranger!"

"Sometimes I think you are," rejoined Constance. "Mother, I will not submit to dictation. I will not submit to unjust criticism. I will not allow any one to act as if I were eternally in the wrong."

"But to leave me, your own mother!"

"If you needed me, I would not. But you don't need me, mother. I'm a constant reproach to you. Because I haven't married, you feel that I have somehow brought disgrace upon you."

Mrs. Keener, though she felt that it was a moment in which honesty was demanded, could not entirely forego a lifetime's habit. She touched her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Now don't weep, mother," said Constance impatiently. "Let's be frank for once in our lives. I know all that is on your lips—talk of ingratitude, of daughterly respect, of love—all the rest of it. But you yourself don't feel what you want me to feel. You're angry because you haven't been permitted to have your own way."

"You're very unjust, Constance," said her mother severely. "I'm sure that I never talked to my mother this way."

"Was it because you didn't want to, or because you were afraid to?" demanded Constance.

"It was because I respected her," snapped Mrs. Keener. She looked indignantly at Constance. "How do you think I'm going to explain your absence from home?" she asked.

Constance smiled.

"I knew, mother, that the explanation would seem infinitely more vital to you than the fact."

"Well, a mother has some natural feelings, some natural regard for her daughter's good name."

"That I choose to live in town will hardly affect my good name."

"Well, people will ask me—I won't know what to say."

"Tell them the truth," suggested Constance.

"That my own daughter is so ungrateful, so disobedient, so entirely lacking in respect, that she leaves me?"

"I said the *truth*, mother."

"Well, isn't that the truth?"

"Never mind. Good-by, mother. And for pity's sake, don't weep. In your heart, you're extremely glad to see me go."

Mrs. Keener colored, started to say something, and left the room.

Constance went upstairs, packed a trunk, left orders to have it sent to the Martha Washington, stuffed some essentials into a hand bag, and left the house.

That she was doing anything brutal she could not see. On her own side was this: She must definitely give up all idea of molding her life to suit herself or she must take the reins in her own hands. She must be "mother's little girl" or she must be Constance Keener, a personage belonging to Constance Keener. On her mother's side was this: A shock at separation, but a shock tempered by relief at the removal of an irritating presence. For Constance did irritate Mrs. Keener. Constance was a failure in her mother's eyes. She had not married, had refused an irreproachable millionaire. She had an individuality, and Mrs. Keener was the sort of person who shrank from contact with an individuality.

Constance knew that she chafed her mother sorely. Therefore, she felt no compunction about leaving her mother. But—this while she waited at the station for a train—she did feel compunction that she had not been candid, had not been honest. For she was not leaving her mother—good reason though

she had—because of their mutual irritation, because her mother dictated, because her mother had tried to do a petty thing to-day. For when she had asked for the twenty-five hundred dollars, Constance had not thought of leaving home. It was not until the check was in her hands that that plan had come to her. And the reason for the plan was this: She would not have to see Jim Kernochan if she left Oceanside!

CHAPTER VI.

Constance stared at the card that had been brought up to her: "Mr. James Blagden Kernochan." She wavered between inclinations to tear it up and to kiss it. How dared he? What right had he to call upon her? He was *married!* And yet to refuse to see him meant confession of fear to see him. For he had felt her lips clinging to his own, had known—being the stranger man, he *must* have known—that he had drunk of her soul that time he had tasted her lips. Being who and what he was, he must know that Constance knew him for the stranger man. In that case, knowing that her heart was his, he would know that fear was behind her refusal. And if he did not have the love-born intuition she credited him with, he might think that refusal to see him meant dislike of him on her part.

Still, a man would know that the kiss she had given came from a love that, though newborn, was old as time itself, that it could not be superseded by dislike. He had done a despicable thing, to summon her love to life when he had no right. She had fled Oceanside to avoid him; it was useless to see him, could do no good, and—

She went downstairs to one of the Martha Washington's parlors.

It was three days since she had left home. In those three days she knew, from her mirror, that she had changed

in appearance. Physically, mentally, and spiritually she had suffered, and the result seemed to be a delicacy that blended well with the air of strength and self-reliance that had not entirely left her.

Not entirely, but in part. Three days are but little in the scheme of eternity; not enough for a soul to find itself, but sufficient time for the groping after one's soul to show in one's eyes, in one's manner. Entirely aside from the fact that she was going to meet Kernochan, the stranger man, Constance wore an air of diffidence, almost of shyness, that vastly became her.

Kernochan was pacing back and forth before a window. Although he could not have heard her light steps on the heavy carpet, he turned as she entered. He advanced to meet her, his eyes hungry. He held out both hands to grasp the one she offered him.

"You'll forgive me? You have forgiven me?" he asked.

Constance removed her hand from his clasp.

"Forgive you?" she questioned.

He pressed a hand across his forehead. The palm came away moist.

"Need we—fence?" he asked. "You know—I know. It happened in a moment, but—it came to both of us, didn't it? Don't tell me I'm wrong! Don't tell me I presume! I *don't!* You—you let me read your face—there, under the lights at the door of your house. And what I read told me what I had not known, had not dared hope."

"You'd known before," said Constance.

He colored faintly.

"Perhaps, but it was so much—I had no right—I stayed home all the next day. I couldn't go into town. I had to thrash it all out. And I had to fight to keep away from the telephone, I wanted so to hear your voice. And yesterday—last night—I could wait no longer. I called, and your

mother told me where you were. But—I didn't like to seem abrupt—to her. I had to make my call of decent length, even though you were not there. And then it was too late. But now— Oh, Constance, it's true, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said, "it's true."

They sat down beside each other on a sofa. She looked at him frankly, and he could see the hollows beneath her eyes, the frank expression in the eyes themselves. Yet slowly the hurt faded, as content possessed her. What matter that fate had denied them to each other? Nothing. They both knew; it was enough. To one who looked on and knew what was happening, Constance realized that she must seem stripped of shame. But to herself—and to herself only did it really matter—she knew that being stripped of shame merely meant being unashamed. What the heart does must be right. Could there possibly be wrong where such perfect faith existed?

She waited for him to speak.

"I thought—that it was all dead," he said. "I didn't know that there was a chance for love to grow again in my heart. Then—I met you. And I feared. And I avoided you—tried not to know you, the real you, for fear it would grow unbearable, the eternal, aching want. I thought that I had hid it; I had no right to let you know. And then, when I saw your face as I told you that I was married—I knew that you cared, too. And if we both cared — I've fought it all out, Constance. Convention has tugged at me, conscience has tugged at me, even my love for you has tugged at me. But a man is selfish. As I told you the other night on the train, a man gets more than he gives. I told you that if ever I married, I would be willing to give, would want to give, as much as I received. But it isn't possible. For what I give cannot be what you give. Were I unmarried, I could hope to give; but as

it is—it's impossible. You see, the world is never content with the lily; the world wants to know where the lily grew. And we—it would have to be known that the lily of our love had its roots in what the world calls sin. And a man—he doesn't mind that—that the world must know. But a woman— It's different."

"Yet if a thing is worth anything, it is worth struggle," said Constance.

"Struggle, yes! That enhances its value. But struggle means the ability to fight back. Where one lies down and lets the enemy trample over one—there is no struggle there. And we—we would have to let the world trample, trusting to our own resiliency to rise again—and— You see I can't give as I would."

"Tell me," said Constance.

He knew what she meant. Once again he passed his hand across his forehead.

"I was twenty-five. She was two years older. She wanted a man, needed a man, and I was a boy. We tried; she tried, I think, harder than I did. I— A man is too ready to say that he has made a mistake and to avoid study of how to remedy the error. Yes, she tried—hard. But—it couldn't be done. We were mismated—utterly. And she left me. Had I been as—well, wise— then, as I am now, things might have been different. I'd have—acted as I told you the other night that I would act were I to marry. But by the time I'd grown wise, which means unselfish — I hope I don't sound a prig, Constance! I only want to—make it clear if I can. Well, by that time, she had ceased to love me. And I—well, I'd ceased to love her. I respected her—I do respect her—for many things.

"She will not be my wife. Oh, yes, I tried—hard. But she—wouldn't. I don't blame her; when one has ceased to love it is—debasement to continue together. But—she won't give me my

freedom, doesn't want hers. She—is cold, and cold people are apt to be—heartless. She—she does what her conscience tells her to do, but her conscience considers only the letter, never the spirit. It isn't her fault; it's her viewpoint, a viewpoint that was born with her. She can't change. And so—we separated six years ago.

"I've been cowardly. I found that I'd enjoy life more if I were not known to be a man separated from his wife. Not that I wanted a bachelor's liberty—at least, while I wanted it, I never acted as if I possessed it. I've paid no attentions, avoided women save as a man must know women casually. I've kept—clean, Constance. Much as I wanted divorce, I knew that she would give it to me on one ground only—if I were unfaithful to my marriage vows. And that—I would not be. Not until love, real love, came again. And now that real love has come again—I had to see you, had to talk with you, had to let you know everything. But it is real love, Constance. And real love can't let the lily be trampled upon."

"But not all the mire in the world can make the lily different from what it really is," said Constance.

"It can be soiled, crushed."

"But it's still a lily, isn't it? And when one knows that the lily isn't *really* mired or crushed, but is bruised and soiled only in the eyes of people who lack true vision—should we care?"

"I wouldn't, but—you're a woman, Constance."

"I'm a lover before I'm a woman," she answered.

There was a moment's pause. Then she spoke again:

"But if she doesn't love you, why won't she let you go?"

"Conscience. Rather, the thing that she calls conscience. She doesn't believe in divorce. Therefore, because she doesn't believe in it for herself, she doesn't believe in it for me."

"But the divorce would affect you both, so—"

"Oh, if it were a matter of eating poached eggs, and she decided that poached eggs were sinful, she would do her best to prevent me from eating them, even though I vowed upon the Bible that my conscience told me it was all right to eat them. My wife's conscience is not content to work for herself alone; it must work for others. If I tried to divorce her for desertion, she would fight me in every court in the country, and technically she has not deserted me. Technically I deserted her; she had her lawyers see to that. No, she'll divorce me for but one thing."

"Then," said Constance, "she must be given that ground for divorce."

"You mean that you— Oh, Constance, you're too dear to me! You—I couldn't—"

She interrupted him:

"I've been starving for love, Jim, and have just learned it. If it were a case of taking you from one who loved you, even though you didn't love her—I wouldn't do it. But where a conscience that is—morbid, I call it, interferes with the sweetest, purest thing that has ever come to me, I'm not afraid. It is the—appearance of wrongdoing that—that will free you, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"Then that appearance shall be given her."

"But not by you, Constance! I can—make it appear that— Oh, she'll think that she has ground enough. And then, when she's divorced me—you and I—"

"And I shall have been a perfectly safe coward, unwilling to risk anything for what I would risk everything for. And—and"—her face flamed—"I—The idea that your name had been coupled with—with any one's but my own— And that way would be so false. I will not sin, but the appearance of sin I'm willing to assume if that will

—bring you—to me. The world must talk. Well, let it not say about you that any—any woman— Oh, Jim, if the world must talk, let it talk about you and me, not about you and some one else!"

"Constance," he said hoarsely, "do you—care that much?"

"More, Jim, than you can ever know. You've awakened me and—"

"Have you thought of your mother? Of what you owe to her?"

"I owe her nothing. She bore me and—handed me over to trained servants, lest I interfere with her pleasure. She, recently, having, through idleness and unwillingness to learn anything, fallen behind— Jim, mother has no friends among her own social equals, because she hasn't kept the pace. Too idle to study, she has suddenly discovered that a woman's place is the home, and that a woman shouldn't want to know more than the home. That is because, her physical attractiveness gone, she receives no more attention, because, having been thoroughly self-centered all her life, she is no longer interesting to people. Now, being idle and not in demand, she must have some outlet for her energies, energies that are not strong enough to make her wish to do, but make her wish to interfere.

"I owe her nothing. Too late, seeing an outlet for pettiness, she's chosen me as that outlet. I've resented it. She's tried to make me do as she willed, without consideration for me. Shall I consider her? Why, Jim, the thing that'll bother mother most is not that her daughter has done wrong, but that it is known! My soul—she'll rant about my soul, but she'll be thinking only of what her neighbors are saying. I know mother. She's never considered me one moment. As a little girl, I remember crying for her. I only wanted her to tell me a story, to sing me to sleep. And she never did it, *never!* I might muss her dress, might plant a sticky

kiss on her complexion. I won't consider her. I'll only consider"—she hesitated on the pronoun—"us."

"And you'll go—"

"Anywhere and at any time, Jim."

The parlor was deserted. He leaned toward her. But she placed her hand against his chest.

"Not that—yet," she said. "You will remember, Jim, that I am to be your wife? And that, until I am your wife —"

He bowed over her hand.

"I won't forget, Constance," he told her.

CHAPTER VII.

Details Constance left entirely to Jim. "Don't ask me anything," she pleaded. "Just tell me when to meet you—no more."

Nor would she permit him to see her again in the interim.

"But you may change your mind," he said. "It's—a big thing, Constance, and a brave thing. And you might not have the courage—"

"That's exactly it," she replied. "If I can't find it in my heart to do the thing I want to do, to—to seize my life by the throat and *make* it give me happiness—if I can't do it by myself, without pressure, without borrowing courage, then I'd not be worthy of happiness. I don't want to yield to persuasion. What we plan to do, Jim, is either battering down a fortress or it's picking a lock; it's either a big thing or it's a little thing; it's courage or it's cowardice. There isn't any halfway ground. It's one or the other. And if it's what I think it is, a big thing—what I *know* it is—I'd be unworthy of it if I couldn't make up my mind to it by myself, unprejudiced by pleading or argument."

Three days had passed since he had left her, three days of ceaseless work and three nights that left her haggard each morning. The work had been

found at the settlement house. Madge had not meant to leave the house in the lurch. It had so happened that there was some one to take her place on the day she married Rennesdale. Beyond surprise at her sudden leaving, and regret at losing her, the house authorities and patrons had nothing to say. No censure was coming to Madge. But the woman who was ready to take over the reins of management of the house developed an acute attack of appendicitis on the day following Madge's marriage. Some one else, who might have filled in for a while, was called West by the illness of a close relative. And certain of the house patrons thought, in this emergency, of Constance. Telephoning to Oceanside, they learned from Mrs. Keener Constance's address. And Constance had consented to take over the management of the house for three days, the time needed to make arrangements for filling the place until the appendicitis victim should recover.

The work had kept Constance eternally on the go. But she had hailed it as a blessing, for, while her mind was made up, there were always bad half hours with her, and they could be eliminated during the day by very pressure of things to do.

But the nights, when there was no physical work to do, and when she was too tired to read—Long, long ago, for freedom, for the right and privilege to do as their conscience told them to, Puritans had crossed the seas, founded a nation. From that stock Constance had sprung. From those forbears Constance had inherited tenacity of purpose, willingness to defy the rule of the majority provided her conscience told her so to do.

And her conscience, while it did not tell her to do this thing, did not forbid her to do it. That is, she did not believe, would not admit to herself, that it was her conscience that spoke to her in the watches of the night. She be-

lieved—and won some slight surcease of agony in the belief—that it was fear, fear of convention, fear of consequences, that harassed her. And she was not a coward. Happiness was her right; she could gain her right by being brave.

By herself she fought the battle, and when Jim Kernochan telephoned her that his business affairs were in order, that he had written his wife of his determination to find happiness, and that, if Constance were still unafraid, they would begin their fate on the morrow, she was very calm, very quiet, as she agreed to meet him at the Pennsylvania Station.

She had left the settlement house in mid-afternoon, in charge of the substitute who had at last arrived, had done some shopping, had drawn money from the bank—until marriage was a fact accomplished she would touch none of Kernochan's money, allow none of it to be spent upon her—and now, somewhat more peaceful of mind because her assent over the telephone seemed to have given finality to all her doubts and hesitations, had dinner brought to her room.

In negligee she ate it, had the dishes taken away, and was wondering if, after all her exhaustion, physical, mental, and spiritual, sleep would come to her early to-night, when her room telephone rang.

She answered it, to learn that Mr. Merton Torrey was calling.

"Tell him that I'm very sorry, but that I can see no one to-night."

She hung up the receiver with a little vicious click. Merton Torrey was the last man on earth she wished to see this evening. Merton Torrey, with his wealth, his position, represented law, convention, all the things that she was determined to defy. And yet she felt a little sorry for him. He would learn so soon about Jim Kernochan, and Constance could appreciate the masculine

point of view, could understand that her apparent giving of herself to Kernochan—for so it would seem—would hurt Torrey infinitely more than if she were to marry a man unbound by other marital fetters. She would hurt Torrey in man's most vital spot, his pride. But her regret for him passed quickly.

A magazine, she thought, might help her woo sleep. Idly she was glancing at it, seated in a broad rocker, one foot curled under her in a schoolgirl fashion that spoke of her litheness of figure, when the telephone rang again. Impatiently she answered it.

It was Torrey himself on the other end of the wire this time.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Keener," he said, "but—I've a message from your mother, and I can't tell it over the phone. Couldn't you see me for a few moments?"

Constance hesitated. Yet, after all, her mother was her mother. Mrs. Keener had written her daughter one letter since Constance had left home, a letter that had meant to be dignified, but that to Constance's embittered eyes was merely whining. But even so—

"In a quarter of an hour, then, I'll be downstairs," she told Torrey.

On the moment almost, and in the same room where she and Jim Kernochan had reached their momentous decision, Constance met Torrey. She was faintly surprised at his appearance. His features seemed to have become lean, and leanness became them. Instead of a jerky self-confidence that had always grated on Constance, and that, had she known it, was simply the result of effort to conquer shyness, Torrey's manner was diffident, almost humble.

He began without preamble.

"Your mother telephoned me this morning," he said. "She asked me to come out to see her. I did so. She—she is very worried about you, Miss Keener."

"Well?"

Her coldness, her heartlessness, but made him the more humble.

"I feel myself very much to blame for the differences, the unfortunate differences, between your mother and yourself, Miss Keener."

"You are not to blame in any way," she told him. "If it hadn't been you that we had quarreled about, it would have been some one else. Mother, Mr. Torrey—I have to tell you; mother seems to have told you so much, anyway—mother can't understand my refusal of you. She—thinks I ought to marry—thinks I ought to marry you. She's used to having her own way. She attempted to dictate to me, and—This isn't pleasant for you. I'm sorry to have to speak this way. But—mother doesn't think a girl should regard a man as a man; she should regard him as a husband—as a possible husband. And the virtues of possible husbands are quickly catalogued—sobriety, position, money. It happens that I prefer to regard a man as a man."

"And I don't fill the bill?" he asked. To her amazement, she having always regarded him as without a sense of humor and as sensitive, he smiled.

"You just don't happen to be the man," she said.

"And I haven't offended you? I mean, nothing that I have done has caused you to leave home?"

"How could it?" she asked.

He colored the least bit.

"I didn't know—I was afraid—I was precipitate—alarmed you—and that you resented it. Let me tell you your mother's message. I made it very clear to her that I considered myself definitely out of the running, that I realized that I was offensive to you, that there was no hope for me. And your mother—I think you do her an injustice, Miss Keener. Your mother admires you tremendously; entirely aside from her natural affection for her only child, she admires you. But she"—he colored

again—"she thought that you *did* care for me, but simply didn't realize it. And so—she was tactless. She knows that, now. She wants you. Wants you to come back to her, wants you—

"She told me, Miss Keener—and she doesn't mean this as a bribe at all—that she had suddenly realized that it was unfair, unjust for her to hold the purse strings. You are a woman grown. She seems to understand now that while you are mother and daughter, you are also two partners, with equal and individual rights, and that she has assumed the attitude that her home was *hers*, that she *provided* it for you, when, as a matter of fact, she now feels that whatever is done about the home, whatever is planned for it, should be done only with your consent, your desire, equal with her own. She has decided that for her to exert, or attempt to exert, any authority whatsoever is to be thoroughly unjust. If, of her greater years, she could advise you, she would want to, but not to force advice upon you, not to rule you. Miss Keener, she wants *you* very much, and—she isn't as young as you are. Old hearts don't recover from blows as do younger ones."

For a second Constance felt a tug of pity at her heart, but it passed. Her mother's offer— Constance had wrung independence from her mother before this sudden change of heart. This sudden discovery of partnership—it came only after Constance had, by threat, won her independence. Her mother was offering no more than she had already been forced to give. Were it not that she had decided as she had done, were there no Jim Kernochan in the world—well, the fact that her mother had humbled herself would have won instant response from Constance. But now, when to yield meant to give up, almost, life itself— Constance shook her head.

"I can't go home, Mr. Torrey," she

said. "And please excuse me. I don't want to be talked to any more. I don't mean to be rude, but please go now."

CHAPTER VIII.

In a corner of the waiting room, sitting very still, her face pale, but her eyes and mouth determined, Constance was found by Kernochan. She seemed oblivious to the scurrying throngs, seemed, to Kernochan's eyes, like some disembodied spirit musing on the futility of all things earthly. But the light that came into her eyes as he approached was very human. Kernochan's pulses leaped.

In a voice that he did not quite succeed in keeping steady, that lost all the careful casualness that he had planned to have in it, he said:

"The train leaves in ten minutes. I was delayed. I have the tickets. Shall we go?"

Constance rose to her feet. Kernochan lifted a hand and a porter hurried to them and possessed himself of their bags. He led the way to their train, and they followed silently.

Kernochan had engaged a drawing-room for the trip to Philadelphia. They sat down opposite each other. Constance shivered, though the day was not too cool for fall.

Kernochan leaned over and patted her hand gently.

"Be brave, dear," he said.

The corners of her mouth, up to now so firm, dropped pathetically. Her lashes rose and fell quickly.

"I'm going to, Jim, but—you must be kind. There'll be times when it will be hard not to—cry. You'll be patient? You'll be generous?"

What he might have said she was never to know. For the door of their drawing-room was wrenched violently open. Framed in it Constance beheld the broad figure and the flushed face of Merton Torrey.

How he had found them, what he thought—Constance had barely time to put these questions to herself when he spoke. His big chest rose and fell; perspiration poured from his forehead. Evidently he had been running.

"Your mother!" he said, between painful inhalations. "A shock—wants you—at once. You'll come?"

Constance looked from him to Kernochan. Kernochan rose.

"I don't—How serious—"

"You—shut up!" cried Torrey. "I'm talking to her!"

He looked at Constance.

"You've only a moment. The train's about to start. Are you coming, or are you going to run away from where you're needed? Are you a quitter or not?"

Constance, too, had risen. She was fumbling with her bag.

"Never mind that," snapped Torrey. "Kernochan can send it back—to me, understand, Kernochan? To me! So there won't seem—*To me!*"

"But look here, Constance," protested Kernochan, "you can't—It's all planned. We've made up our minds—"

"But a shock," quavered Constance. "She needs me, and—"

"Does she need you more than I do?"

"You yellow dog!" said Torrey.

Kernochan flushed; his hands clenched; he took a step toward Torrey. Then, as if disdaining the beefy man, he turned to Constance. He laid a hand on her arm. And then the storm broke. Torrey stepped inside the compartment. His flushed features grew more red. He seized Kernochan's wrist and pulled the hand from Constance's arm. And when he spoke, it was thickly.

"Let her alone! Don't you touch her, you damn' cad!" he said.

And then, before Constance could even cry out, it happened. For Kernochan tried to break Torrey's grip on

his wrist. He swung his other hand, and he went crashing into a corner of the compartment from a blow on the mouth that drew the blood. And somehow, seeing Kernochan drop impotently before Torrey's crashing right hand, something seemed to die in Constance. A moment ago she had felt the protective impulse surging in her, when Torrey had told Kernochan to "shut up." She had wanted then to strike Torrey. But now, when Torrey had done something so infinitely worse—had struck the man she loved—Constance had merely a desire to get away, and the desire was not born of her innate distaste for violence, her prejudice against "scenes."

Rather, she was disgusted, and her last look at Kernochan was not one to allay disgust. For it seemed that his bloody mouth was twisted in a snarl—not a fighting snarl, but a frightened snarl. And he did not try to rise.

One moment Torrey stood, hands clenched, teeth bared. Then his mouth relaxed into a grim smile that vanished as quickly as had the snarl. He seized Constance by the hand.

"Hurry!" he commanded.

Dragging her after him, for all the world as if she had been a recalcitrant child, he raced down the corridor of the train. The wheels had just begun to move when he swung her to the platform. And when she would have paused, breathless and—finally—indignant, he would not let her.

"Just catch ten-seventeen—express," he grunted.

Still holding her hand, he rushed her to the platform that held the Oceanside express. Despite the cries of a brakeman, he lifted Constance from her feet and placed her on the steps, where the brakeman grasped her arms. Constance felt like a sack of coal. But she was pulled up to the platform, and Torrey, running along beside the moving train, leaped up and joined her.

"Risk your necks that way," grumbled the brakeman.

"Thanks," said Torrey.

He slipped something into the brakeman's hand that quieted that worthy's indignation.

Then he took Constance inside the train, found a vacant place, and sat down beside her.

"Sorry to have rushed you so," he said apologetically, "but there isn't another train for an hour."

"It's all right," she said dully. "Is mother—" She couldn't finish the question.

"It really isn't dangerous. A first shock rarely is," he said. "But if to the shock is added worry about you—She needs you. A maid from your home telephoned me this morning—half an hour ago. Said that she couldn't get you at the hotel, that they said that you'd left. So I came here."

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Simple enough. I have a secretary. Smart little woman, good as gold, too. Was upset this morning. Crying when I reached my office. Told me why. Just learned that her worthless husband was going away with some woman. Told me what I hadn't known before—that the Kernochan who was her husband was also the Kernochan whom I knew casually from my visits to the Oceanside Club. Told me quite a bit about him in a few moments. Unfaithful to her a month after they were married. Oh, there's a lot to it. Suffice it that he's a romantic liar who is no good. Sorry if I hurt you, but it'll do you good. She wouldn't divorce him, plucky little beggar! Know why? She said that he was a fascinating chap, might win almost any woman, and she didn't want any woman to go through what she went through with him. And she tells the truth, too, mark that. I know her. Been my secretary three years. Independent. Won't take a cent from him.

"No, she wouldn't divorce him, although I think she'd like her freedom. Doesn't care a straw for him. He killed anything like that long ago. She despises him. But he knew that if he compromised any *good* woman, she's just the sort that would free him, for the sake of that good woman. She got a letter from him this morning. Told what he was going to do. Didn't mention names, but begged her to release him, for the sake of the woman in the case. Had some decency, not to mention your name. I think he really loves you. But a cad, just the same."

"You mustn't speak that way of him," said Constance.

"I notice, though, that you've listened rather intently," he rejoined dryly. Then, as she colored: "You haven't considered other people's feelings, have you? Haven't thought of your mother? Or, if you have, you quieted your conscience with a lot of rot about justification, about how little you owe her. Never occurred to you that your mother brought you into this world, that that alone creates some sort of debt, did you? Oh, I know how you feel about such matters, with your ahead-of-the-minute ideas. The child didn't ask to come here; therefore, whoever invited him must be entirely responsible, must devote every thought to that child, must thank God for the proud privilege of being parent to the child. Fine world if every one thought that way, wouldn't it? Maybe it's up to date, maybe it's logically all right, but it's a blamed poor sort of life that it stands for."

"You know what you need? You need a spanking, a good one, and I'd like to give it to you!"

Constance's lips set at the insult.

"Please don't talk to me any more," she said.

"No? Why not? Do you know, young lady, it seems to me that you owe me a whole lot? I've saved you from

wreck and ruin. Some day, maybe, when you grow up, when you begin to live a little bit for other people and not entirely for yourself, you'll appreciate it. Just now, of course——”

“Y-you have a high opinion of me, haven't you?” said Constance, her lips trembling.

“Well, take a good mental look at yourself. Have you a high opinion of Miss Constance Keener?”

“At any rate, you have no right to say anything to me,” she said defiantly.

“Right? Well, that's open to debate, but we won't bother now. The thing that counts is that I have the power. You can't very well leave this seat—not without a scene, and you'd hate a scene. You're perfectly willing to outrage convention privately, but a public scene—you'd shrink from that, wouldn't you? Of course you would. I know.”

“I hope, among all the things you know, that you know how I despise you,” she said.

“Oh, I can endure that,” he replied lightly. “You see, I'm helped by the knowledge that no matter how you despise me, you must despise Jim Kernochan a whole lot more.”

“I think his wife lies,” said Constance hotly.

“Oh, I wasn't thinking of that. I was thinking of the pretty picture he made lying on the floor of that compartment. I don't know just what he may have said to you. Probably that love justifies everything, that happiness is what counts—what we are entitled to from the mere fact that we live. Or no”—and his shrewdness amazed her—“probably Kernochan was reluctant, let you advance those arguments, let his great regard for your good name be overcome by your insistence on sacrifice. I guess I've got the pup's number.

“No, never mind about whether his wife lies or not. You know that she doesn't. But a man that wants to defy

the world, and then, by golly, takes a beating without a comeback, lies on the ground when he's perfectly able to get up—— Yes, I guess Kernochan stands a little lower in your eyes than I do.”

She bit her lip, for he told the truth—told less than the truth, for she did not despise him, while Kernochan—How could she have done what she had done? How could she have wanted to throw herself away on a liar and coward? For those were the things Kernochan was.

A kiss in the dark! And she had let the ecstasy of that kiss blind her to all that life had taught her, until now she was a *thing*, a thing that had been saved from worse than folly by this beefy, red-faced man beside her. She shuddered. Self-contempt ruled her. Was she the sort of person who would naturally be expected to figure in an affair like this from which she had been rescued? If not, how had Torrey known that she was the one with whom Kernochan was eloping, if Kernochan had mentioned no name in his letter to his wife?

“How did you know that I—that I was the—woman? Does—every one know?”

“Don't like that, eh? Doesn't seem so romantic, so heroic now, eh? No, every one doesn't know it. But Kernochan happened to live at Oceanside, and a blind man could tell last night that you were laboring under some strain. And I wondered—that was all. I took a chance that it *was* you. Nothing else I could do, eh? And as Kernochan, to give his wife evidence, had told on what train he was leaving—Easy enough.”

“And you—assumed at once that I ——” The blackest shame, the wildest remorse swept over Constance. “You knew that I was the sort of woman who——”

For an instant kindness was in Torrey's tones.

"My dear little girl, I knew that where you thought you loved, you would never count the cost. I knew —— Look here, Miss Keener, do you suppose I thought that there was anything *wrong* between you and Kerno-chan? That there *could* be *anything wrong*?" Then his voice grew harsh. "But I don't think I'll pay you any tributes. You don't deserve them. I told you a while back what you deserved—and needed."

But something was singing in Constance's heart amazingly. Merton Torrey had known that—well, that though Constance could fall in love with a married man, she could not yield herself until that man was free. How she had changed, she thought a second later. To be elated because Torrey held her virtuous! To be joyed because of a negative quality! For to be virtuous is nothing positive; it is the natural state of woman.

The train drew up at the Oceanside station. They alighted and entered a public automobile.

"You're coming?" said Constance.

"I like your mother," he replied shortly.

They held no more speech on the swift ride to the Keener home. Although her mother might not be very ill, still, the thought that she was ill at all hurt Constance now. She reproached herself, as she had reason enough to do, in the new light that had just come to her.

A white-clad nurse opened the door for her. She bowed gravely to Constance, and her gravity brought a lump to Constance's throat. A shock! How had she kept calm at all? A shock! It was a dreadful, horrid-sounding word.

"Is she—is she—" She could not finish the question.

The nurse shook her head.

"Mrs. Keener is very low," she said. "A second shock occurred an hour ago.

She is conscious again, and—crying for you. Will you go to her at once?"

Constance stumbled up the stairs. She saw through a blur of tears. She was hardly conscious that Torrey's arm was about her waist, supporting her.

CHAPTER IX.

Somehow Constance managed to clear her brain when she reached the threshold of her mother's room. Pausing a moment to lean against the wall, she fought against her emotions, brushed away her tears. Her features were composed and her step firm when she entered the room.

Her mother was lying in her bed and, incomprehensibly, she seemed to have shrunk, occupying less space than ordinarily. She looked very old, and her face had a grayish tinge that does not need to have been seen before to make its message clear.

"Conny!" she whispered. "Conny, my little girl!"

Constance fell to her knees beside the bed. Her hands reached out and clasped gently one of the suddenly frail hands that lay on the coverlet. She pressed it to her breast.

"Mother, mother *dear!*"

Mrs. Keener smiled.

"Mother's little girl! Conny, I'm glad you came."

"Oh!" Constance choked. How close she had been to not coming!

The fingers that lay against her breast moved faintly, petting her.

"Mother's little girl! And mother is so sorry—— Mother didn't know—— Mother didn't understand——didn't always try to understand—I was selfish."

"No, no," said Constance, agonized.

"Yes. Young mothers are—so often. I was. And, afterward, I couldn't seem—to understand. Not a good mother. Selfish. But loving. Conny dear."

"Yes, mother *dearest*, I know, I know!"

"And you forgive—mother?"

"Mother! Forgive *me*!"

Mrs. Keener was silent for a moment. Her breath came labored and harsh. Constance shot a look of alarm at the nurse, but that competent person shrugged her shoulders and signaled with her eyes. Constance needed not to be told that if there were any chance for her mother, she, Constance, had it in her power to give or to withhold it.

"Mother—wasn't a real mother—until lately," said Mrs. Keener. "Lately she has begun to study. And—mother has had no tact. She—she— But mother knows."

How many times had Constance heard her mother use those words, and how she had hated their sound! But it was different now. For now they wrung her heart; they seemed so pitiful, they seemed so charged with that love that passeth understanding—the love of a mother for her child. Selfish Mrs. Keener may have been, ambitious more for herself than for her daughter, but in the final test, Constance seemed to know now, the mother would have laid down her life for her child.

And, knowing this, Constance blamed herself, not merely for the final estrangement between them, but for the lack of sympathy that had existed almost since she could remember. For she had been critical all her life. Of different tastes and ideas, born a questioner, not an acceptor, her mother's views had always irritated her. Conscious, without conceit, that her brain—even as a child—was bigger than her mother's, Constance had never tried to get her mother's point of view. She had always seen more than her mother, yet she had never made any serious effort to adapt herself to the narrower view. Instead of sympathy, she had had criticism, instead of a smile, a sneer. And so she had grown to believe that there was nothing that her mother could give her, no lesson to be

learned from the older woman's years. She knew better now—had learned new things. For the past few days had taught her that her mother had been right in her summing up of Constance's attitude toward the world. Age-old instinct had been more reliable than youthful brain.

"Mother wanted her little girl to be happy. Mother—is going to leave her little girl now."

"No, no!" begged Constance.

The weak fingers patted her bosom again.

"Mother's little girl mustn't cry. You must be brave. Mother is not afraid."

It was true. The woman who had often groaned a whole day through over a slight toothache, who had often fretted herself into illness over a trivial disappointment, had no fear when death might be lurking beyond the next moment.

"And, Conny, you mustn't be afraid for me. If I knew— Conny, Mr. Torrey is a good man. If I only knew that he— Conny, couldn't you? For mother's sake? Conny, I tell you what you don't know yourself—you love him. Mother knows! Conny, won't you promise me? It isn't selfishness. It isn't that. It's— Conny, won't you marry him?"

Mrs. Keener's voice had risen; her words were audible to the nurse, to Torrey, standing in the doorway.

The nurse swiftly approached the bed. She laid a finger on the sick woman's pulse. She gave Constance a warning look.

"Please—please—Conny darling, before mother goes—promise—"

The voice was shrill now, and the tender smile had left the gray features. Agony, fear were in the eyes. It was as if, almost through the gateway, the light beyond shone through, illumining the past, as if her mother knew—today.

"Mother *dearest!* Mother, I promise! I will, I will!"

The sick woman's head rose from the pillow. To her eyes, to her lips, came the smile that women wear when they gaze upon their newborn infants, bea-
tific, all-tender, all-wise.

"Mother's—little—girl!"

A moment later the floodgates gave way, and Constance wept the bitter tears of the child for the parent who has gone.

Torrey had been very formal, even in his expressions of grief. That he had been kind, that he had taken all the funeral arrangements upon himself, Constance also knew. But since then, until to-day, he had effaced himself.

Only important business, as he had carefully explained, had led him to intrude to-day. But it was necessary that she sign certain deeds. A large corporation wanted a plot of land that, under her mother's will leaving everything to her daughter, now belonged to Constance. As executor of the estate, Torrey advised her to sell. And he had just obtained Constance's signature, and the servants, who had been witnesses, and the Oceanside notary had been dismissed.

"Is there anything that I can do for you?" he asked, rising to leave.

Constance shook her head. She had had much to think about in the month that had elapsed since her mother's death. And so to-day she had avoided Torrey's eyes. But suddenly that seemed cowardly. She met his glance.

"I want to thank you—for what you saved me from," she said.

He bowed, but said nothing.

"And—what mother said—her last words—Sometimes people are quixotic. I think that you might be so. Remember," and her eyes grew proud, "that *I* promised mother; not you. That I don't expect you to— You understand."

Formality left him.

"And why shouldn't I hold you to your promise?" he asked.

"After—after what you—know of me?"

"Know of you? What do I know of you that isn't good?"

"Why—that day— Jim Kerno-
chan—"

He laughed.

"That wasn't you. That was a silly girl that— You never loved Kerno-
chan. You loved me. You love me now."

Her eyes flashed resentment.

"How can you say such a thing? You know that—"

"Oh, deny it as you please," he inter-
rupted. "It doesn't matter what you do or say now. Some day you'll realize. And when you do realize, Con-
stance," and his voice grew suddenly gentle, "then you'll make me the proudest and the happiest man on earth."

"Then you intend to keep me to that—promise?"

"Of course I do."

"Then—then you're a cad!" she blazed.

"Am I?" His face grew red, angry. "Young woman, I've stood a lot from you, I think. I wonder"—he stepped close to her—"I wonder if you'd strike me this time."

She had retreated, but at his words she paused. Through her ran a hot thrill. She stared at him.

"You? On the veranda? You?"

"Who else?" he asked. "Why, didn't you know me? I thought that you were angry at your yielding, that I had of-
fended, that that's why you wrote me that refusal. Constance, didn't you know? Why, I'd been able to leave town after all, took a short cut across the links from the station, climbed up over the veranda, saw you— Con-
stance, whom did you think you were kissing—at first—before you grew an-

gry? By God, if you thought I was some other man——”

Still she stared. And as she stared, she saw him in a new light. His face wasn't so—er—facial. His eyes—they weren't big, but they were set wide, and they were so clear, so honest! And he really wasn't fat; he was stocky, muscular, powerful. And his conversation

— Madge Rennesdale was a *fool!* Because Madge didn't happen to care for him particularly, she had voted him a bore, and Constance had accepted Madge's opinion. But now, now that she thought— Until Torrey had shown unmistakable signs of being in love with her, hadn't he been a most pleasant companion? Hadn't he been intellectually delightful? Had she been bored by his verbiage? Not at all. His earnestness had interested her, and it was earnestness that made him talk.

Then—then all her views of marriage had been correct! She could not love a man until they had met on a common intellectual ground. She and Torrey had done that, although she had never appreciated it because of Madge's voting him a bore. She had not been un-

true to herself when she had let her lips cling to his on the Oceanside veranda. What had stirred within her had not been stirred merely by a kiss; it had begun to stir weeks, maybe months, before, only she had not been aware of it.

And she had told herself that “mother was right.” Still true, but not in the sense in which she had meant the admission. For mother had not only known that Constance wanted her “true knight,” but mother had known just who the true knight was! Amazing mother! Appraising her at her true worth, without letting charity enter into the appraisal, banishing love from the judgment—intellectually little though mother had been, narrow of perception, of view—mother had been able to read her heart. Mother had been *right!*

“Did you think,” growled Torrey, “that it was some other man? Did you think that—”

Her muscles, which had been rigid, relaxed and she swayed toward him. He caught her and hugged her to him fiercely. Her parted lips rose to meet his—the lips of the stranger man.



DOUBT

WHAT can I give my dear,
Who has given his heart to me
That I may keep his love
Safe under lock and key?

Oh, I can give him a singing voice
And a body white and fine,
But what if he asked for an old, old dream
That once in the past was mine?

What if he came to seek for love
Where never love can win?
What if he knocked at my empty heart
And said: “Sweet, let me in!”

ELINOR CHIPP.



A Desperate Girl

By Fannie Heaslip Lea

Author of "Chloe Malone," "Silly Ann," etc.

AT the time Jim Glenny went on the city desk of the *World*, he was barely twenty-nine—with out knowing which, you might be inclined to twitch a lip or lift an eyebrow over the story of Flora McGrew and the thing that he did for her.

Now this is not a newspaper yarn, except in so far as may enable you to see the unusual sincerity of Glenny's attitude toward his job—the clean, straightforward vitality of his efforts to do the right thing for the people who daily paid out their hard-earned pennies for his paper. For the *World* was no exponent of silk-stockinged journalism. Its headlines were worked out with a view to getting the attention of the man swinging from a strap in the crowded six-o'clock car; of the woman waiting on the doorstep for the potatoes to be done, so that she could go in and dish up supper; of the little shopgirl soaking her feet in hot water tinctured with somebody's Imperial Foot Ease, in the endeavor to forget that she had stood upon those feet for ten long hours out of a deadly uninteresting twenty-four.

These were the people to whom Jim Glenny deliberately made his appeal—these and others like them.

On the night of his advancement to the city desk, he went to see a woman in whom he had begun to believe he might be going to find the girl of his

dreams—dreams made up a fair-sized part of Glenny's equipment—and he said to her, among other things, that now he was going to make good with himself.

"What do you mean?" asked the woman, prettily uncertain.

Her name was Nita Denis, and she had eyes the color of wet violets, set in a small, pointed face—a little colorless, like eggshell porcelain.

Glenny told her what he meant. He got up from her old mahogany davenport—she was the sheltered scion of an old, but not overly prosperous, family—and stood before her old black marble mantelshelf, beside her old and exquisitely wrought brass fire screen, with both hands in his trousers pockets.

He looked like a keen-eyed, clean-lipped young business man. His hair was smooth and decently close cut, his clothes were good, his nervous brown hands well kept. But he talked, according to all of Nita's inherited inhibitions, like a wild ass of the desert—or something just as good.

"I'm going to make the *World* a paper for the people." That was part of what he said. "I'm going to get under the skin of the fellow that reads it. It's going to be a daily human document—something the men and women who buy it can look to for interest and advice——"

Nita smiled, an airy, almost imper-

ceptible smile, tipped with a feather edge of malice.

"Heart Throbs for Girls—Kitchen Callings—Little Folks' Page—that sort of thing?" she inquired softly.

"If we can't get to 'em any other way—yes," said Glenny.

But his eloquence subsided a little. He was always rather sensitive to ridicule.

"I mean," he went on doggedly, "I'm going to have the straight *facts* in every case, but written up so that anybody who can read can't miss 'em. It won't be literature, but it'll be life."

"In red ink—and italics?"

"If necessary."

"You think that's working on a very lofty plane?"

"There'll still be caviar for the critics," Glenny retorted. "Anybody who doesn't like the *World* can go off and read regular stuff. I'm appealing to the kind that will be glad to have what I'm going to offer them. When I begin to get a bunch of letters every day or so, written on cheap paper and honestly misspelled, I'll know I'm getting my show across. What's the matter? You can't see it, can you?"

"I rather hoped," sighed Nita, "that you meant to improve on the *style* of the *World*. Everybody laughs at it now—it's so yellow. I'm disappointed."

"Well, I'll endeavor to see that it gets all the facts in the case—all the time. But as for the style, it will probably, from your point of view, be a lot worse before I've done with it," said Glenny stubbornly.

He went home after that, feeling slightly out of touch with his dream girl, and although he saw her again, more than once, still, the unsubstantial romance which had been budding in his mind, in connection with wet-violet eyes and leaf-brown hair, never materialized. So nigh is grandeur to the dust! If Nita, whose object was, delicately speaking, matrimony, had real-

ized in time the full strength of Glenny's humanitarian theories, she might never have opposed him, for she was not without intelligence and knew, as every woman knows, that the thing to be considered in choosing a husband is not what he thinks, but what he can get for his thoughts. However—

Glenny took up his new office with unbelievable enthusiasm. At thirty-five, he would have been less confident; at forty, less sincere. Only the late twenties could have justified him. But he got results. Within six months, his daily mail required a special stenographer, and the circulation of the paper had jumped twenty-five thousand. It was, in that particular town, emphatically "the paper of the people"—that, in fact, was the slogan at its masthead.

"Tell the truth and don't lower your voice," was Glenny's advice to any new man—or woman—coming into the office. "Get your whole story into the headlines; then cut loose on details farther down. Don't be stingy with your adjectives. The man in the street will eat 'em for dinner. He's got a right to a little excitement."

A bit later—seven or eight weeks, say—when Glenny had got magnificently into his stride and was going like a race horse, came the letter from Flora McGrew. It was badly written, in a shaky schoolgirl hand on cheap, tinted paper, and Glenny read it over twice, at his stenographer's request, before he felt that he could accurately place it or in any way visualize the writer.

"Somehow it sounds—I was afraid to turn it over to 'Talks With Girls' without letting you see it first. Do you think there's a story in it?" inquired Miss Foley, the stenographer, doubtfully. She pushed back her hair from a high, smooth forehead and made a gesture of putting away her pencil.

"Leave it here. I'll look into it myself," said Glenny. He had somehow received from the odd little scrawl a

distinct sense of personal responsibility. It read:

DEAR WORLD: I see a great many people write to you about their troubles [Glenny published, from time to time, certain of the letters that came to him, together with appeals for assistance, and never failed of finding answers] so I thought I would do it myself. There isn't anybody else for me to write to. What I want to ask you is this: Isn't there any way in this town that a girl can make a living and stay decent? I've tried and tried and tried, but I'm getting so tired I can't try much longer, and my money's about all gone. I don't want to be bad, but I've got to live, and if something doesn't turn up pretty quick, I don't see what I'm going to do.

I thought you might know something.

It was signed with naked and naïve directness, "A Desperate Girl," and gave an address in one of the poorest parts of town—the squalid and sordid outskirts of an outgrown residence quarter.

Glenny answered the letter at once. He did not for an instant doubt the genuineness of it, and if he had, he would still have given the writer the benefit of the doubt. He rattled off his answer on the typewriter before him:

I have read your letter, and I think we can help you. I am coming to see you myself—to-morrow—at about half past two. Tuesday, the ninth, that will be. Meantime, I am inclosing a five-dollar bill if you would like to borrow it. Don't lose your nerve. We all get up against it some time or other.

When he had sealed his own letter and dropped it in the basket for outgoing mail, he put the shabby pink note of "A Desperate Girl" carefully away in his desk. He did not observe that it was, by its postmark, already a day old, and must have lain in the office over Sunday.

Next day, at about twenty-five minutes of three, he rang the cracked and ineffectual bell of 2917 Pearl Street and inquired for Miss Flora McGrew. He had thought of the girl once or twice in the course of a rather full twenty-

four hours, and her environment justified his desultory expectations—a drab, unkempt little street lined with close-shuttered houses, dry grass overrunning the sidewalks, a saloon with a conspicuous "Ladies Entrance" at the corner, one or two children and a visibly depressed goat lingering upon some cryptic business of their own, a negress cursing volubly in an unseen back yard.

"Good Lord!" said Glenny to himself, and rang the bell of 2917 again.

The woman who eventually answered his summons was deep-bosomed and flabby. Her greasy blond hair was knotted at the back of a grayish-looking neck, and she held a purple-and-green kimono, of sleazy cotton stuff, about her by one negligent hand. A very unpleasant sort of friendliness emanated strongly from her smile.

She said that Miss McGrew was in, she reckoned, and that it was a nice day, wasn't it?

Glenny followed along a dark and rancid-smelling hallway into a small, dark room, wherein he dimly perceived red and brown velvet chairs, a center table laden with knickknacks of the kind common to such center tables, one or two lithographs, and a crayon portrait of a stout, youngish-looking man with a mustache.

"Want me to call her?" asked the languid lady of the kimono. Glenny rather expected her to address him as "Dearie," but that formality she omitted.

"If you will be so kind," he said.

After about five minutes Flora McGrew came in—alone. Glenny heard the other woman singing in an upper room—something about perfect days and inevitable endings.

He went over to Flora McGrew with his hand out and said:

"How do you do? I'm Jim Glenny, of the *World*. I wrote you I'd be here to-day—"

There he stopped, and her hand slid limply out of his clasp.

"How—how are you?" echoed Flora McGrew, in a soft, breathless sort of stammer.

She looked at him out of big, dark eyes, black-lashed and heavily shadowed. Her mouth was tremulous, and directly he released her hand, she clutched it tightly with its fellow.

"Please—sit down," she said.

Glenny fetched two chairs, and they sat down facing each other. If she was ill at ease, so, amazingly, was her guest.

For Flora McGrew, the "Desperate Girl" of that tawdry pink note, was, after all, only a little thing—little and slim and, you would have said to look at her, somehow absurdly sweet. Her heavy brown hair, too heavy for the pallid little face beneath it, was coiled untidily upon the top of her head. She wore a shabby blue serge skirt and a limp white blouse; her shoes were wearing out at the sides. In her eyes there was the wincing apprehension of a dog that has been kicked, and she seemed to be of a ghastly and unbelievably youth.

"How old are you, for pity's sake?" asked Glenny abruptly.

"I'm twenty-two," she told him, twisting her hands together in her lap. She had not offered to open a window, and the room was full of a musty and oppressive twilight.

"You look much younger than that."

"I was twenty-two last October." It was then the latter end of March.

"Are any of your people living?"

Glenny was trying hard for a businesslike friendliness of manner, but something about the little figure huddled so wearily in the hideous red velvet rocker perplexed and baffled him. He wanted to take her by the hand and smooth the ruffled brown hair. She seemed so much a child and yet so dreadfully removed from any innocence of childhood.

"I don't know where my father is. My mother's dead. She died the year I left grammar school. I haven't got anybody—much."

She was not looking at him, but at the fingers twining and intertwining in her lap.

Glenny's voice grew gentle.

"Lost your job?"

She nodded.

"How long ago?"

"I was in the crockery and kitchen furnishings at a place downtown." She named a huge and cheaply managed department store. "They turned off a lot of us because they're losing money since the war began. I got another place after a while—in the notions—at a little store on the avenue. I lost that, too. It's hard times, you know. Everybody's saving."

"Yes—I know," said Glenny. A tide of pity swept over him.

"Then what did you do?"

"Then I had to move. I used to live in a nice place farther uptown. I came here. I saw the sign on the window—'Rooms and Board,' you know—one day when I was passing."

The abyss was nearer now. He could see that her feet had approached it with infinite shrinking. Its horror lay upon her white, small face. Her voice thickened with remembering.

"I had just a little money. It didn't last long. And I couldn't get any more work."

"Then you wrote to the *World*?" Glenny was helping her past the worst of it. When she did not speak, he prompted with his friendliest smile: "You got my letter?"

"This morning."

She put one hand to the breast of her blouse and drew out a five-dollar bill, folded, as it had come from the envelope.

"You haven't used it yet?" asked Glenny kindly.

"Not yet."

She sat there holding it, looking oddly numb and dazed, her eyelids heavy.

"Well," said Glenny briskly—he made an effort to fling off the gloom of the place, to get her to look at him and be assured of the relief he was bringing her—"well, we're going to fix it all up for you now—get you a job—get you out of this mud hole—get you among friends. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I'd like that," said Flora McGrew.

"All right. All you've got to do is to leave it to us—and try to make good at your job when we find you a nice one. I've got to be getting along to the office, but I'm mighty glad to have seen you. Just remember you don't have to worry any more. You've got a whole big newspaper looking after you now. As I wrote you, we all get up against it some time."

He stood up. So did she.

"I think myself," Glenny continued warmly, "you've been a mighty game little girl to hold out like this—when the other way is so damnably easy—"

For the space of one moment, Flora McGrew's great black eyes lifted and looked wildly into his.

"*It is not!*" she cried, in a high, thin, hysterical voice like that of a creature in intolerable anguish. Then she stopped, crushed the back of one hand across her mouth, and set her teeth into it.

The ugly, dark little room was suddenly still. The smell of dust and damp and long-forgotten dinners persisted like a physical offense.

"What—do you mean?" Glenny asked at last. He had, unhappily, to know, if he were going to help her, but his voice stumbled over the question.

Flora McGrew told him what she meant, the flesh about her lips whitening as she did so.

"This—this is Tuesday, isn't it?"

"Yes—this is Tuesday."

"It was Saturday I wrote to the *World*. If I could only have heard Sunday! Or anyhow Monday! The woman who runs this house— She let you in—"

"Yes. Go on. Don't be afraid!" said Glenny. For a moment it seemed as if the life were draining out of her before his eyes.

"Well—she said—she said Monday was my limit. I owed her already for over three weeks. She—she said she'd throw me out into the street Monday night if I didn't give her some money by then. She said I knew how I could get some money any time I wanted it. Other girls did." The monotonous little recitative broke in a gasping sob. "Oh—do—do I have to tell you about it? Don't you see? It's—it's too late!"

"You poor little kid!" said Glenny huskily.

Flora McGrew continued to look at him out of wide, sick eyes.

"Then this morning, your letter came—with the money. I had to laugh." But she did not look as if she had ever laughed in her life.

"It's a damned shame!" said the man, between his teeth.

"Yes—it is—kind of a shame—isn't it?"

They stood facing each other in that sinister little space, that stifling red-velvet-and-lithographed gloom.

"So she said"—the drooping little figure beside the center table took up her tale again—"she said I was started now—I'd have to keep on. She said nobody decent'd want to have me around after—after—and that I should worry. I could make more money that way, anyhow. But if that's so—" with a burst of impotent wildness, infinitely more pitiful than tears.

"Well—what?"

"I told her I could always kill myself," said Flora McGrew heavily, "and she just laughed. She said, 'No

chance!" So I wasn't going to tell you the truth at all, but when you said that *that* was easy—I had to scream it out—" She locked her hands behind her with a gesture of world-old weariness. "I don't guess you can help me, now."

Glenny looked at her a moment in silence. All he had said to her seemed suddenly so much smug, ineffectual, patronizing folly before the sheer brutality of her tragedy.

"Will you let me try?" he asked at length.

Tears roughened her soft voice into an absolute passion of pleading.

"Do you—do you think you *could*?"

"Will you do exactly as I tell you?"

"Anything—anything in the world!"

"All right. Get your hat and come out of this place with me."

"Leave my things?"

"If you try to take them, that she-devil in the kimono will make a row."

Reawakened horror seared her face.

"I'll come. I won't be a minute."

"I could have her arrested, of course, but we'd rather not have any undue publicity just now, d'you see?"

"You think—you do think that you can—"

"I've got a vague idea. It's got to be worked out. Find your hat, and we'll get away from here, first of all. I can't breathe in this rotten hole!"

So Flora McGrew fetched her hat, a cheap black straw sailor with a black-and-white ribbon about the crown, and Glenny took her away from 2917 Pearl Street, much as you would pick a draggled little kitten out of the gutter and set it upon its feet, if you happened to have a feeling for kittens or draggled things in general.

"I know an elderly woman who keeps a quiet kind of boarding house, down on Dane Street," he told her. "She'd do almost anything for me. I happened to get her son his job. She considers

it an obligation. I'm going to take you there."

"Are—you—are you going to tell her?"

"No," said Glenny slowly, "I'm not. I'll just tell her I want her to look after you and get you something to wear—d'you see?—as a favor to me."

"If—if she doesn't know about the other—it can't hurt her—can it?" begged Flora McGrew, pathetically eager.

"No—what she doesn't know won't hurt her," Glenny admitted gravely. "That's probably how the saying originated, eh? Then I'll thresh this thing out to-night, and I'll be around to see you at noon to-morrow. Meantime, try and pull yourself together—and don't answer any questions."

It was a little before noon next day, however, when Glenny took Flora McGrew's hand in the comfortably respectable double parlors of the house on Dane Street, and looked at her appraisingly.

"Much better." He nodded.

"I do feel fresher," said Flora McGrew shyly.

She had ironed her blouse, and her hair was smooth as silk. Glenny realized for the first time that she had, beside youth, an oddly engaging sort of prettiness—wistful as a wood nymph.

He sat down, having seen her seated in the corner of an old-fashioned sofa, and unfolded his plan.

"Here is the story of your life," he said succinctly, drawing a piece of paper from his pocket. "First of all, though, you swear to do exactly as I tell you. Is that understood?"

Solemnly Flora McGrew raised a small right hand, lifted a worshipful glance.

"Good! Now read this over. I wrote it out last night."

When she had read it over, the girl

looked up, her eyes darkening with memory as with a mist.

"That's all correct—as you told it to me yesterday—isn't it?" prompted Glenny.

She met the suggestion with a kind of tortured stubbornness.

"Yes—it's all true—up to— But you've left out—Monday night." The blood burned over her face and more slowly over his, as well.

"That's just what I meant to do. You're to tell this to any one who wants to know. All of this, but nothing more. You're to wipe out—Monday night—as if it had never existed. If you do, I think I can help you. If you don't—well"—Glenny shrugged—"no woman you meet will give you a hand, and no man would be allowed to—the kind of a hand you want, d'ye see?"

"I'll have to lie—right along—about that?"

"You'll have to reconstruct your life upon a lie. That's an interesting commentary upon our social system. But, by gad," said Glenny, warming to his subject, "I think it can be done! And I'd like to try it! You're the girl who's absolutely up against it, d'ye see? But you never give up the fight. You're game right through. Not even starvation itself can lick you. You stay good to the bitter end."

"Please!" whispered Flora McGrew in a small, shaken voice. "Please don't!" He realized, before she turned her burning face away from him, that there were horrible, heavy tears in her eyes.

"Why, you poor kid!" said Glenny softly, as he had said it to her once before. "I am a brute! I didn't mean it. But don't you see—it's the world's point of view you've got to meet, not mine? Personally, I know it wasn't your fault—that life was just a bit too big for you—and if it rested with me, why——"

"Yes?" she insisted, her eyes hungry upon his keen young face.

"Well, you could come back, d'ye see?" said Glenny, trying to be casual about it and failing oddly. "Now get this stuff I've written out for you by heart, and sit tight. In a week, there'll be more people wanting to help you than you can count on the fingers of your two hands."

"What are you going to do?" she asked him fearfully.

"I'm going," said Glenny, rising, "to run the letter of 'A Desperate Girl' in this evening's paper—in the middle of the editorial page—and see if the town has a heart."

He did, and the town had. Inside of a week, as he had prophesied—of course he ran follow-up stories from day to day—more than a score of people had offered work to "A Desperate Girl," and two out of the score wanted to give her a home.

"I think you'd better take this elderly couple with no children," Glenny advised thoughtfully, "and take the job at the stationer's—if you want to work. Then you'll be nicely fixed. By the way, you haven't been worrying about your ex-landlady, I hope?"

"I did think she might see the papers," said Flora McGrew diffidently. The old look of sickened recollection came back into her eyes.

"We haven't used your name in a single instance. All the correspondence has passed through my hands. It's been 'A Desperate Girl' all along. Oh, no! She won't be out looking for you. She'd be too much afraid of the police. You can rest assured of that. Everything's clear before you. I've made inquiries about Mr. and Mrs. Williams. They're just what they seem—a lonely old couple, reasonably well off, nice old house, one servant. They'll be crazy over you in no time. It's all plain sailing, now."

They were standing in the pleasant

coolness of the boarding-house parlors on Dane Street, and suddenly Flora McGrew put her hand on Glenny's arm with a little nervous gesture.

"And if I—if I'm ever mixed up about things—or want to know something—shall I come to you? I'll be frightened sometimes, you know—"

"I'll give you my telephone number," said Glenny. "After all, who has a better right to my advice than you?" He looked at her whimsically. "It'll be pretty quiet, of course. Do you like to read? *That* might help."

"Oh, books!" said Flora McGrew, with a long, unsteady sigh. "I'm crazy for books! Do you think I'll be able to read a lot?"

Her soft, dark, heavy hair, her soft, half-frightened eyes, even the well-brushed blue of her old serge skirt, the freshness, against her fresher skin, of the blouse his money had bought for her stayed strangely in Glenny's mind when he had left her.

So Flora McGrew, the rehabilitated soul of Glenny's furnishing forth, went to live with Edward and Sarah Williams, the kindest, most impractical old pair in the world; went to work for a quietly prosperous stationer in the business part of town; and little by little won back to a sort of joy of living that rosed her cheeks and glimmered in her eyes like morning at seven. She made several widely separate and diffident appeals to Glenny for advice—first, when she had been about two months in her new home, a matter of Red Cross work and insistent neighbors.

"I want to awfully—and they've asked me to," she told him over his private wire one night. "It's making bandages and things for the soldiers, you know. Afterward they have tea. It's a sort of club. Do you think I might?"

Her voice gave Glenny an odd little flare of pleasure. It was so childishly

soft, yet its inflections seemed somehow already more those of the sheltered woman.

He told her firmly:

"There isn't a reason in the world why you shouldn't. Go right ahead."

"I'm so glad! I've been reading a lot, but I haven't been out—very much."

"You should get out, though. Do you good," said Glenny.

Later, she asked him for a list of books, saying that she could get anything she liked from the shop, and told him rather proudly that she had been reading Dickens and Thackeray. After that some months went by before she called him on the telephone. She stammered oddly when he answered.

"I only wanted— It isn't anything much. To-day's my birthday, and I wanted to tell you they had a cake for me with twenty-three little pink candles. Aren't they *sweet* to me? And a—a—young man who works in the shop gave me a box of chocolates."

"Oh, he did?" said Glenny, the more coolly because he found his pulse quickening like a drumbeat at the first hesitant words. "You amaze me! Well, many happy—"

"Oh, don't! Please don't!" came the tremulous little voice over the wire. "I wanted—I *had* to say 'thank you.' It's you that did it all for me. You never will know—"

He heard a smothered sound, then the click of disconnection. Glenny sat quiet for some time, staring into the black and vacant mouthpiece of his own telephone. He was wondering, rather concentratedly, if Flora McGrew had changed at all in appearance, how she was doing her hair—and just where one's responsibility toward a rehabilitated soul came to an end. It may be admitted that he came to no definite conclusion in the matter.

Neither did he endeavor to see Flora McGrew, or even to take her to an

occasional friendly movie, as he was sometimes tempted to suggest.

"Hands off, old man! It's on the knees of the gods," he said to himself, and grimly left it there.

However, about the first of November, she herself called him, and he knew in the first ten words, over the wire, that something had frightened and unsteadied her.

"I—it's something very important," she said. "I hate to be a bother, but—couldn't I—couldn't I *see* you? I don't want to talk about it over the telephone."

"Suppose," said Glenny quickly, "that I come up to the house this evening after dinner, and we go for a walk in the park. You won't want to talk in the house, either. I'll explain to Mrs. Williams that it's a personal matter."

He did not inquire of himself if he were glad or sorry that the meeting had come about so naturally. He thought a good deal, in the course of the afternoon, of Flora McGrew's small, terrified face as he had first seen it against the unpleasant gloom of a certain house in Pearl Street. Her eyes were vivid in his memory. He found himself unable to thrust aside their shadowy look of suffering, of shrinking from something unseen and unforgotten.

But the Flora McGrew who walked with him into the autumnal chillness of the park that night was not the Flora McGrew of Pearl Street. She had changed inscrutably; partly a matter, perhaps, of a youthful blue taffeta frock and blue roses on a small, but sympathetic hat. She gave him a shy little hand. Her eyes were almost starry. Glenny had not, in recollection, he decided, done justice to the wood-nymph quality of her smile.

"I think you're terribly good to come—like this," she said earnestly.

"Do you?" inquired Glenny.

It was some time before he could get out of her the thing that she had wanted

to tell him about. It came at last, as they were crossing the deepest, most dry-leafed shadows of the park.

"And he—he wants me to—to marry him, you see," finished Flora McGrew, "and what I want to know is—shall I tell him?"

They stopped, facing each other in the Southern November dark, which is not summer and is not winter, but breathes a little wistfully of each.

"Tell him—what?" asked Glenny carefully.

"You know what I mean," said Flora McGrew.

He could not see her face—more than a pale, sweet blur in the gloom—but her voice turned a knife in his heart. Wherefore, he spoke with a kind of especial curtessy.

"It's the young man at the stationer's, of course? Are you—in love with him?"

"No," said Flora McGrew surprisingly, "no—not really in love. But he is a very nice sort of person, awfully quiet and good and all that—and very settled—and I thought you might like me to marry him. I'll do whatever you say about it."

"Good God!" said Glenny.

She displayed a passionate stubbornness in the face of his exclamation.

"Well, I was, done for, wasn't I? And you—you pulled me out of things—you *made* me. My life really belongs to you. If you think it would be better for me to marry him—I want to do whatever you want me to. All I want to know is—shall I tell him? Won't he find it out some day—if I don't? And would he *want* to—if he knew—"

"Of course you are not to marry him," Glenny interrupted brusquely. He bit his lip and was silent.

"Oh," said Flora McGrew, faint as a little night wind.

"It would be a crime!"

She winced away from him at that,

clutching the dark-blue folds above her heart with one cold, slim-fingered hand,

"I see. You—you think I oughtn't to marry anybody—of course."

"I certainly don't seem to *want* you to marry anybody—unless—" He was staring at her with smoldering eyes, his clean young jaw tight set.

"Well?" said Flora McGrew bravely. "I want to do whatever you say."

"You do? Are you sure?" Glen-ny's voice was suddenly unsteady. The smoldering eyes had broken into flame. "Then go back to this man and tell him—tell him why you can't marry *him*.

It's because you're going to marry *me*! I don't want you even to think about him! You're mine! I think I must have known it, all along."

His calm broke—remember that the big, dark eyes of Flora McGrew had been looking out of most of his dawns and darks for months—and he put his arms about her and kissed her. As his lips found hers—she gave them up to him blindly—she became, undisguisedly and forever, the girl of his dreams.

Just so you may have seen a little moon slipping out of cloud murk into the open sky.

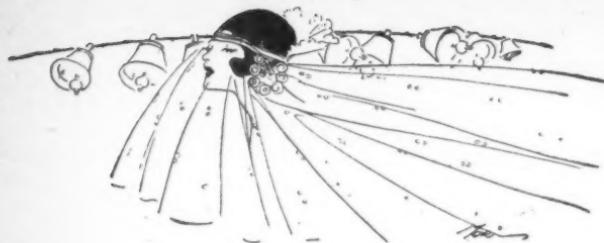


ASTRAY

TURNING aside from white, main-traveled ways,
Once have you broken path through field and wood—
While burs and briars teased you all they could—
And counted clearer gain than stale, smug days
The heart-shaped petals of a wild rose, sown
By gypsy winds, and—*your* wild rose alone?
Or, dragging weary feet through dank, hot cover,
Once have you seen a startled wood bird hover,
And stooped to find a cunning, small igloo—
A nest of brown pine needles smoothly wrought,
A wondrous lodging, hid from all but you?
Or, in the sweet, mist-curtained August night,
While pale marsh lanterns mocked you for a fool,
Kept you a tryst with beauty, caring naught
For black, fat slime, so you could watch the light,
The sheen, of starshine in a woodland pool?

Those say, who leave Love's clear, main-traveled road
Down secret paths with Love's own self to fare,
"For us the cheating lights, fine thorns that goad—
Yet still the rose, the nest, the stars are there!"

MARGUERITE MOOERS MARSHALL.



Angels

By
May Edginton

Author of "Magic Life,"
"The Woman Who Broke
the Rule," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TO-MORROW," said Mary.
"What's to-morrow?" muttered Steven Hands.

Auntie grunted softly and said:
"She thinks it's the beginning of the world. We all do. But the world began long ago."

When she had contributed this damper to the flame of youth, she sat by the fire and fiddled her fingers and closed her eyes.

"Oh, but," said Mary, "to-morrow is always the best day that ever was, isn't it, Mr. Hands?"

"So long as it never comes," the young man replied.

"I'm longing for this to-morrow," said Mary, "and it will come."

"Work always does," said auntie.

"I'll be glad to work," said Mary.

"So you think," said auntie.

Steven Hands looked to see that the old lady's eyes were still closed, and they were closed, for she had tired them out, sewing by firelight; then, leaning toward the girl across the table, he whispered:

"If I had my way, you'd never work."

The table had a red cloth and a lamp on it. Under the shade of the lamp, the young girl looked timorously at the young man. Years of school and college had sequestered her. She was unready for anything in the guise of natural passion, unwilling, and hostile toward it. She sensed and drew back

before it warily. But with the kindness of one who was yet in heart a child, she said:

"Let me mend your coat sleeve for you before you do your packing, Mr. Hands."

"Thanks," he muttered, "thanks. I've been here so long—two years, you know—that it'll seem strange to go. Your aunt has been so kind—like a mother to me. I wish I could stay."

"That," said the young girl firmly, "is impossible. Now that I'm through my training, I wouldn't allow auntie to take boarders any more. Ever since I was five, she's looked after me, and now I'm twenty, and to-morrow I'm going to look for work. I'm yearning for to-morrow."

Steven Hands asked, frowning:

"How do you suppose you are going to 'look for work'?"

"I shall call in answer to advertisements. And to-morrow morning will bring me answers to my advertisement."

"To-morrow's going to do a lot," murmured auntie, getting drowsy.

"Did you advertise, Miss Ellis?" asked Steven Hands.

"She *would* do it," said auntie, rousing slightly. "She said she'd been advised——"

"By whom?" he demanded.

"Do you suppose young girls nowadays ever tell anybody anything?" said auntie, nettled. "Parents and guardians—mum-mum-mum——"

But the young man was looking under the lamp shade at the rosy, slow flush that stole all up the girl's throat and cheeks till it lost itself in her black hair. Alive as he was to the urgent desire to settle the question of the sex of this adviser, he yet paused in a sort of confused wonder as to whether she was sweeter in her usual mood of aloof and creamy pallor, or when she blushed thus, warm and quick. Jealousy of the cause of those virgin fires flowed in him like a lava torrent, but his sense of resentment at her reticence outdrove it.

"Whoever it is," said auntie, "oughtn't to write to her without a proper introduction."

"Is it some one who—who writes to Miss Ellis?" he asked.

"A friend," said Mary, on a tone quick and warm as her blush.

"Why," said auntie, "you've never even seen him!"

Steven Hands veiled his eyes and waited.

"He writes to her every day," said auntie. "It used to be once a week, but now it's every day. And we don't even know his name and address."

She opened her eyes for a moment to stare reproachfully at Mary.

"We ought to be going if we're going," said the young man after a pause.

Mary's hat was lying on the table, her coat over a chair back. With the careless certainty of a woman who is both young and beautiful, she could put on both without the aid of a mirror, and feel confident in the result. Auntie settled to slumber, but Hands watched the charming performance closely. He found it very charming. The free, unstudied poise of the girl as she raised both hands above her head, the hat between them, gave him anew the desire to catch and hold her. She held the long pins in her strong, small teeth while she tucked her hair sleekly away over the ears. And she was conscious,

but not of Steven. The blush had not died away. When she turned her eyes to him, he saw that they were dreamy, and he cursed in heavy silence. She held out her arms behind her for the coat and he flew to hold it.

"It's lovely of you to take me out on your last evening here," she said to him with a naïve smile.

They went out.

The narrow street of small houses was bleak. A spring wind swept it, cold and cruel. She shivered daintily, and he exclaimed, with a thrill at ordering her: "Turn your coat collar up!" He put out a hand and rolled the collar up himself, masterfully, under the light of one of the infrequent lamps.

As they stood there, a man met and passed them slowly, looking at them both. His coat had a great fur collar, and his hat was an aristocrat, and all over him was stamped the impress of his power. It was not his size, though he was big; nor the command in his eyes, though it was clear; nor was it his clothes, though they were plainly the habit of wealth. There was something other and greater and stronger about him than any of these, something that made both man and girl turn to look after him as he passed on.

"That man," said Mary, "has been in this street twice this week."

"Indeed!" said Steven, with a quick and slighting sneer.

He hated the big fellow who had gone by looking as if he owned the world and could manage it single-handed. Money! Money to burn!

"He looks as if he had plenty of money," he said, taking Mary's arm in his hand. "We shall be late if we don't hurry. I booked our table for seven. We must hurry."

But by seven they were safely in the little French restaurant which Mary's choice and Steven's purse favored. It was sorrowful to him. He felt it was indeed good-by, this wonderful little

eighteen-penny meal. It was like seeing a dear traveler off at a railway station, standing on the platform and watching the inexorable train slide out, to sit opposite this young girl and hear her talk, full of to-morrow. He could not help wishing her to see his pain. He said:

"It's been so wonderful since you came home from that school to start your shorthand classes in town. I've looked forward to going there with you in the evenings, trying to look after you. And now—"

"Now I shan't trouble any one any more!"

Radiant at this, she smiled at him tenderly.

"It wasn't trouble; it was joy. Let me fill your glass." He replenished it with Chianti, of which he had ordered half a flask, and looked to see the red wine touch her red lips. "What's all this about a stranger who writes to you?" he asked. "Why does he write, and how could such a thing begin?"

"It began quite naturally. I found a seal ring in the park one day, and next day I saw it advertised for, under a box-office number. So I sent it back, with a—oh, perhaps it was a silly little note. I'd made up a story about the ring. I'm always making up stories."

"A silly little note?" he asked fiercely. "How—silly?"

She leaned her chin in her palm, looked down at the tablecloth, and smiled. Of that smile Hands was horribly jealous. She traced funny patterns, beside her plate, with a finger tip.

"Oh—just a little silly. Fanciful, you know. The day after that I got a letter—unsigned—from the ring's owner, sent through his solicitors and inclosing the reward."

"That could have ended it."

"He asked me to write again!"

"No doubt! No doubt!" He drank Chianti and tried to appear merely

mocking. "You signed your letter, I suppose?"

She nodded, still smiling.

"Supposing this bounder tried to see you."

"I dare you to call him a 'bounder' again, Steven Hands!"

"Oh, thanks, Miss Ellis! Once is enough for me. But, I say, suppose he tried to meet you."

"He wouldn't. He says we can never meet. That's why he remains anonymous."

Vastly relieved, the young man cried:

"So you really haven't the faintest inkling who he is?"

"No," she replied gravely.

"What can you write about to a fellow you don't know?"

"Everything. He gives me advice."

"Cheap stuff!" His little laugh fell flat. "I suppose," he said, "you've made a tin god of the fellow. Women have such well-stocked imaginations."

She slipped off her coat to the back of her chair. In her little round-necked blouse of white, she looked heartbreakingly young and had the extraordinary softness of a new baby. The sight of her so broke Steven Hands' heart. Across the table he sought and found her hand. The fingers fluttered away from his instantly, alert. He was aware of her reluctance for passion, her innocence of it. He guessed, in an inarticulate, vague way, that she was like some one venturing out from a cloister. He felt helpless, angry, bewildered, yet he respected her fears so far as he understood them. He relinquished her hand without an effort to keep it.

"I hate to think of you hanging round offices for jobs."

"I shall get one."

"I hate that more."

"Then?"

"Why not marry?"

"Marry! Me?" She laughed in a chuckle like a tickled schoolgirl.

"Marry. You. Yes. Marry me."

She started, gazing at him. He saw that he had taken on a new aspect to her. Her eyes widened and widened; her mouth grew serious; a dream stole into her face. Had he known it, she was visualizing his offer in the modern girl's way—weighing the unwearying old temptation of Adam against the many alternatives grabbed at by twentieth-century Eve. Now that she was looking at him, he had shifted his eyes to the tablecloth, and was saying:

"I'm not rich, of course. We should have just a little house, or a flat, if you'd rather. I'm getting three pound ten a week and good bonuses. We could be awfully happy together. Ah, I know we could! You're the sweetest girl I've ever met. I would just live for you. You'd be much happier, more comfortable, married, than you would toiling in an office all day, going home tired out, getting up early on foggy winter mornings—"

"But if one married, adventure would be over."

"You want adventure?"

"Of—of course."

"You'll find it. Adventure isn't always pleasant," he said darkly.

He saw the resolve in her face and gave way before it. There was, too, a kind of pleasurable interest sparkling in her eyes.

"Do you know," she said with a little smile, "this is my first proposal of marriage?" It was plain that she had not disliked it.

"I wish it could be the last."

She smiled wider.

"Every girl thinks there's a prince around the corner," said Hands.

"I wonder whose prince you are," she murmured, with an idea of consoling him.

"I feel precious little like a prince."

She was a little sorry for Steven. He worked very hard, that she knew. He had an idea rooted in his worrying brain that by sheer industry he would

get a rise, and get a rise, until one day he would realize himself as rich. Money to burn! It was a dream! Pursuing this phantom with feverish devotion, he was fagged and pale, and there were deep, trembling lines cut straight between his eyebrows. She wondered how old he was. Perhaps thirty? Perhaps even forty—an incredible age!

"How old are you?" she asked.

"Twenty-eight."

"You look more," she said truthfully.

"That's work. You'll look like me—worse—when you're twenty-eight. Worse, because work ages a woman more. There's no woman who can keep her looks after a few years' routine."

Mary gathered her gloves and shrugged herself into her coat. As a garment, it was indifferent to a negligible degree, but she had all the airs of a pretty woman covering herself with sable, as she assumed it. It was natural to her to behave with the queenliness of a pretty woman. Just as naturally, she drew eyes. More than one girl being taken out to dine looked quickly aslant at the coat, summed it up, and said to herself, "Why, it isn't anything after all." More than one man, who could not appraise mere intrinsic values, judged Mary admiringly as a piece of sartorial perfection. Hands was not blind to this, and he thrilled with jealous pride.

"It's an honor to go out with you," he whispered, as she stepped past him to leave the restaurant.

They were bound for the second house at one of the smaller halls. As they settled into their red velvet seats, and Hands lighted a cigarette, he glanced around prívily and saw that here, again, the girl beside him attracted attention.

A popular favorite in a queer, mongrel frock came on to the stage confidently, smilingly expectant of the applause that broke forth; then, in the

sudden fashion that was one of her tricks, she opened wide her little crimped mouth and sang.

Hands took the cigarette from his lips, whispering to Mary, who sat innocently entranced:

"If you went on just as you are, you'd beat her to fits. These stars are nothing, really, except for tricks."

She whispered back: "I think I'd like to go on the stage."

"Oh, good God! No!" he said in holy horror; for he had, like many middle-class young men, a rooted prejudice, amounting to disgust, against that which he paid a great part of his salary weekly to see.

CHAPTER II.

When Mary awoke, she thought with solemn joy, "To-morrow has come." She lay in the cold dawn, her window opened wide to the London morning, and heard the neighboring clocks strike. They said seven. She did not wish to get up. She assured herself, quite like an old workaday person enjoying an extra half hour in bed for a treat: "Last time I'll do it. Must make the most of it," and snuggled down.

But then she heard—for all the rooms in the tiny house were huddled together—Hands' bed creak as he got out of it and flapped in loose slippers to the bathroom, and the charwoman's knock down on the street door below, and auntie saying, "No, don't *you* go down, Mr. Hands. I'll let her in." Then, for shame, Mary arose, yawning, and staggered, a little giddy with sleep, to her dressing table.

Upon it lay her diary, open. She had scribbled therein last night:

March 20th. Had my first proposal. Steven Hands. Refused him. Had a lovely evening.

Now she hung over it a moment, her cheeks rosy, partly with sleep and partly with memory, and gazed at the

entry. She closed the diary with sentimental fingers and turned to her glass, more inquisitive than she had ever been before.

March 20th mattered to her greatly. She opened the diary again and penciled, with a crayon, a little red mark against the entry.

In the corridor, going out to her bath, she met Hands in pajamas, flying from his. He was unshaven, and disappeared into his room with a discomfited ejaculation, catching up the shaving mug at his door by some sleight of hand as he ran. She was glad of her decision last night, and sang a little song of triumph in her bath.

Hands heard it.

"She's happy," he said, scowling, and cut himself on the chin with his razor.

He went down to breakfast, which the charwoman had already laid, and stood on the hearthrug, back to the fire, reading the paper. There he had stood every morning for two years, except when he had been away on holiday. This was the last morning, all because of the way women were being educated. If Mary's father hadn't stipulated for so many years' public schooling, to be paid for with the few hundreds he had left, auntie would have been contented to rub along on her pittance and the profits from some nice young man boarder, and Mary would shortly become Mrs. Steven Hands.

"She'll be sorry for it," he said to himself hopefully, "in a year or two."

Auntie came in, distributing letters. She heaped a small pile beside Mary's plate, vindictively selecting one to lay on top.

"That's from *him*," she said coldly, hovering over the letter with an eagle glance. "The others are answers to her advertisements."

Steven smiled crookedly behind his paper.

"Is she getting up?" he asked. "I

hope she'll be down by the time I have to say good-by."

"You'll possibly be traveling to the City together," said auntie, "and I wish you were making a much longer and more important journey together, Mr. Hands."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rackmore," he muttered downheartedly.

The door opened, and Mary came like joy into the room.

They watched her while she opened her letters, the top one first. She did not know that she smiled swiftly over it, but they saw; nor that her eyes grew lumbent, but they knew. She was reading the letter a long while, considering its brevity.

DEAR LITTLE GIRL: So to-morrow you're starting out into the world. I've already written you at length about that, but I want to wish you good luck just before you start. You are very happy, and I don't think the world will make you unhappy. You are very trusting, and I don't think the world will abuse that trust. Don't be afraid of it. It's a good world at bottom, and it will be good to you. I should like to come and take your hand and show you around it, but that can't be. Keep up your heart, and never forget that you have at least your

BEST FRIEND.

"Eat your breakfast, love," said auntie acidly.

Mary turned with reluctance to her plate.

"I was thinking," she said.

Auntie pinched her lips.

Mary skimmed her letters.

"There's one from Glen Leslie & Co., Chartered Accountants," she said, "telling me to call at half past nine. The others are all for between eleven and twelve. I shall start with the half-past-nine one, wouldn't you, Mr. Hands, and go on to the others if I don't get the first one? Wouldn't you, Mr. Hands?"

"You know my views about the whole business," he answered heavily.

She pouted and began breakfast in silence.

"Only girls who can't marry need work," began auntie. "When I was young, no lady thought of going out to work. We were sorry for women who worked. And Mr. Hands has been telling me—"

"What has he been telling you?" said Mary haughtily.

"I've told Mrs. Rackmore nothing," the young man protested.

"I guessed," said auntie. "It's all the same. I think you are a very foolish girl. But the opinions of parents and guardians—mum-mum-mum—"

"May we travel up together, Miss Ellis, if my way is your way?" Hands asked.

She melted toward him again. He was so humble. Besides, he was her first lover, and the first lover is a sort of holy miracle. The first lover is the best of memory's treasures to a woman. Mary had laid Steven aside, but she had laid him in a potpourri of rose leaves and lavender, so that she could take him out and sniff him, very fragrant, whenever the mood was on her. She consented to sit beside him on the same bus seat for the journey City-ward.

As they jolted rapidly over the streets, they talked. She was gay. He was not, but then he had seen her snuggle that first letter down into her coat pocket. She meant to carry it about with her! To read it again, no doubt, at her tea-shop lunch! To frustrate that, he asked her to lunch with him.

She wouldn't accept.

"I went out to dinner with you last night," she said sturdily. "And we are both working people now. We are just the same—"

"As if a man and a woman were ever the same!"

She held on her way.

"And you mustn't pay for my lunch to-day, as well as for my dinner last night! I couldn't possibly! But I'll

come and eat my lunch at your table if you like. Just like two men!"

"If that's the best you'll grant me, well—"

"Where shall it be?"

"You say."

She said. He acquiesced. They entered Cannon Street and rolled irrevocably toward the parting of their ways. She was to alight first, and he leaned over the bus top to watch her, with her springing step, hurry along the pavement below. She jostled with the throng. He hated it, but he knew that she was loving it. She disappeared, and a hot constriction affected his throat, and his eyes smarted.

Fool! He turned up his coat collar and pulled his hat down and set his lips.

Mary was hotfoot on her adventure. The great block of offices was full of mystery and primed with fortune. To arrive at the place of appointment was to stand at the gate of the world; to seek for the name on the board in the hall was to quest for the combination of the secret lock.

"Glen Leslie & Co., Chartered Accountants."

And she ran up to the first floor with the energy of a fawn, forgetting the convenience of the lift, disregarding the smiling invitation of the willing porter.

Holding the letter of appointment received that morning, she passed in through the door marked, "Inquiries." Half a dozen girls clicked half a dozen typewriters, and through the open doorway into another room—a tiny cubby-hole of a place, but dignified with carpet, wicker lounge chairs, and flowers—was presented the straight back of a tall woman, graceful, vibrant, but leisurely, dressed with a *cachet*. Yet another door, glimpsed beyond that anteroom or sentry box, was labeled, "Glen Leslie. Private."

The tall woman looked out coldly from her vantage point upon the new-

comer. She had a short, round face, delicately powdered, on a neck like a swan's. Her hair, sleek and provocatively precise, was more sandy than auburn, and had been dressed by a good hairdresser; her eyes were round, brown, wide apart under low, dark brows. Her plain simplicity, her slimly cut shoes and silk stockings, spelled money. She had two or three carnations tucked in at her waist—carnations of a perfection that working women do not buy for themselves.

She looked at Mary Ellis without a word.

"I have an appointment, please," said Mary.

The other spoke. She said:

"Yes, at nine-thirty, I believe." She touched a bell, and an office boy responded promptly. "Ask Mr. Leslie if he can see Miss—"

"Ellis," said Mary.

"Ellis. Thank you. If he can see Miss Ellis now."

The boy disappeared into the inner room, and as she sat down at the desk, with a great bunch of flowers on the top and a cigarette box near at hand, she uttered:

"If you don't mind waiting."

Mary stood. She looked at the other seated comfortably in her swing chair and thought with a touch of feline spite:

"Some day—as soon as I can—I'm going to have clothes like that. I wonder what her salary is, and how long it takes to rise as far as that. I wonder."

"Mr. Leslie will see Miss Ellis at once," said the boy, returning.

Mary passed the desk hastily, without a look; but she knew that, under the low, dark brows, the other watched her, examined her from head to foot. She felt the wide-apart, vigilant eyes following her to the door of the inner room. They gave her a thrill, sowed in her an antagonism, so quiet they were, so cold, and yet with such fire

below their guarded surface. They made her insensibly give her old coat a hitch at the shoulders, step more jauntily, and hold up her head.

The office boy shut the door behind her, and the tall man standing on the hearth with his back to a blazing fire turned and surveyed her. She spoke first.

"Oh!" she exclaimed.

He smiled. She blushed slowly; it was a youthful habit of hers over which she had not yet gained command. She was vexed and bit her lip, looking at him anxiously. She felt that the interview had, owing to her impulsiveness, opened badly for her. For a few seconds, man and girl stood looking at each other silently.

CHAPTER III.

She was comparing Leslie, with a young girl's cruelty, with Steven Hands. It was foolish to say that all men were of the same clay, she thought; that this man and Steven, in nature, were brothers. This man was big, splendid; not because he was rich, but because of some other power about him. She remembered that she had felt all that when he had passed her aunt's house last night, and that the anxiously respectable street had been distinguished by his presence.

How Steven had hated him at sight! Poor Steven! And then she thought: "How that woman hated me at sight!"

She looked shyly, questioningly, at Leslie.

"Sit down," he said suddenly, ceasing his contemplation of her to motion to a chair beside his desk. "You are applying for the post of my secretary?"

"Yes," she murmured hopefully.

"You've never been a secretary before? This is your first job? I can tell by your manner and appearance, you know. And"—he looked past her

expressionlessly—"you're very young, aren't you?"

"Twenty."

"That is very young."

"My typing speed is forty; my shorthand one hundred and twenty."

"You won't want only typing and shorthand. You'll want tact. I can be a perfect monster when I'm ill-tempered."

"I am very tactful."

The man laughed.

"I'll dictate a letter now," he said. "There's pencil and paper." And he screwed up his eyes a little, regarding her as she sat strenuously preserving her pose of confidence and composure while she dashed off:

MY DEAR HIGHLANS: My wife hopes you'll join a theater party to-night. Meet at the Criterion for dinner at seven. I'm not sure if I can be there, but I hope you will. Yours as ever,

"The machine's over there." He nodded to a typewriter. "And the address is, 'Sir James Highlands, LL.D., Ebury Street.' Get it down at once, and mark the envelope, 'By hand.' "

While she typed, he opened a few personal letters. He was apparently absorbed in one when she came back quietly and laid the letter on his desk for the signature.

His telephone bell rang.

"Answer it please, Miss Ellis."

She put the receiver to her ear quickly and said crisply, "Hullo!" A voice with a tang of temper in it replied:

"Who's speaking?"

The girl paused a moment; mischief entered her. She looked around at Leslie, her lips widening in a smile of tremendous daring. Her eyes jumped at his. Her face was full of delight. She answered:

"Mr. Leslie's secretary."

"Secretary!" said the voice.

"Mr. Leslie's new secretary."

The man smiled broadly. The hard-

ness went out of his face. But he shook his head at her gravely.

"Oh!" said the voice. "Well, this is Mrs. Leslie. Please ask my husband if he has spoken to Sir James Highlands about to-night."

"Tell her." Leslie nodded.

Mary said, "Mr. Leslie is sending a note along immediately. It has just been written."

"Thank you," the sharp voice uttered. "Ring off, please."

She rang off, and stood waiting; and, watching with feminine guile, she saw that he was trying to hide a smile and that his eyes were full of kindness.

"You have a fine natural cheek, young woman," he said, getting up and looking down at her.

"Have I got the job?" she asked with a little gasp.

He straightened his face.

"Yes," he said crisply. "You may as well begin at once if you can. Can you?"

"Yes. At once."

"But wait. Aren't you going to ask me about terms and so forth?"

She was chagrined.

"You must think me awfully silly."

"Merely very young. The salary is"—he paused—"is two pound ten a week. Will that do?"

"Oh, splen— Thank you, yes. That will do."

"You aren't going to make your fortune in secretaryships, you know."

"Two pounds ten is a very good start."

"Glad you think so," and he looked at her with an expression that she could not understand. Then he said abruptly, "Will you now go and tell Miss Drummer—the lady in the outer room—that you're engaged and starting at once? You're to have a part share in her room; there's a desk there for you. She'll show you. Come back here when I ring." His gesture of turning to his desk dismissed her.

A reluctance assailed the girl to speak to Miss Drummer, to interrupt the cold steadiness with which she was working, almost as if she knew that the new secretary was standing there, and was bent on avoiding conversation. She had a very long green cigarette holder, from which a fragrant Turkish cigarette protruded, held in her teeth; her eyes were fixed upon her letters, and her *ondulé* sandy head was bent over them.

"I have to tell you I am engaged," said Mary.

"Oh?" said Miss Drummer. "Yes. I thought you would be."

"I'm starting at once."

"Yes?" said the other woman with an unnatural indifference. "One of the girls in the next room will show you where you can put your hat and coat, if you like."

And she bent her eyes to her letters again, flicking ash from her cigarette with a steady forefinger.

But when Mary returned, she looked up and spoke in a different, a more propitiatory tone, as if, during the lapse of the few minutes, she had reconsidered something. She said pleasantly, leaning back and clasping her hands behind her head:

"Have you met—did you know Mr. Leslie at all before he engaged you?"

"I remembered seeing him in the street near my aunt's house. But no; I had never met him. I shouldn't be likely to meet him socially, should I?"

"Ah!" said Miss Drummer, inhaling. "And did he remember you?"

"He didn't say so." But again, for no reason, that foolish blush began to heat her cheeks.

Miss Drummer's brown eyes were on it.

Mary began to talk hastily:

"I'm glad I got this job. It will be nice. And it was all luck—Mr. Leslie making such an early appointment. This just happened to be the first place I called at."

"Ye-es? It's unusual for him to make an early appointment. It's a rule of his never to see any one before eleven, when he's through with his mail."

"P-p-providence," said Mary, stammering a little.

"No!" Miss Drummer murmured, with a hard stare. "Entirely Glen Leslie. No one ever acts for him; not even Providence."

"I am lucky," said Mary.

"There's no such thing as luck," the other replied. Then, with carelessness, "What are you getting?"

"Two pounds ten."

The brown eyes flickered very slightly.

"Did you stand out for it?"

"He offered it."

"No secretary of your age and inexperience has ever had it in this office before."

"I am lucky," said Mary desperately.

"I begin to think you are," said the other, curling her lip.

The quick ting of a bell broke the ensuing silence between them.

"That's his bell," said Miss Drummer. "Don't keep him waiting." She added, as if explaining the peremptory note in her voice, "I'm managing clerk here, you know."

It was nearly twelve when Leslie had dictated all his letters and Mary returned to the little anteroom to type them. This time the managing clerk was not alone. A middle-sized man, with looks and coloring of the ageless type, stood near her desk, talking and laughing with her. He carried his hat and stick, was sartorially exquisite in a neutral way, and his roving eyes were quick to dart to the girl who entered from Leslie's room.

She sat down to her work, but heard him say to the managing clerk:

"Please! Ah, please!"

"Miss Ellis," said the other woman, "you are sure to meet Sir James High-

lans sooner or later in this office. May I introduce him at once? Sir James Highlands, Miss Ellis."

He came to Mary's side with his dapper tread.

"I expect you wrote me that little note I had this morning," he teased. "One comma was left out and all the o's were blurred——"

The door of the inner room opened quickly and Leslie stood there.

"Ah, Highlands," he said coldly, "I thought I heard your voice. Come in."

Miss Drummer laughed when the door had closed again upon the two men.

Silence fell after that laugh. Mary Ellis would not answer or query it. They worked on, the shuffle of paper and the click of the machine the only noises in the room. Twelve-thirty struck.

Miss Drummer rose and touched her bell.

"Ask some one to bring my coat and hat here," she said. To Mary she added, "I hate the lunch-hour crush in that dressing room."

She stood on the hearthrug, looking at herself critically in the little mirror hung over the mantelpiece. She arrayed two or three little pots on the shelf and touched up her face daintily. She stroked herself down into the tailor-made coat of her suit, transferred a carnation from her waist to her buttonhole, and began putting on fresh white gloves.

"I'm going out to lunch," she said, throwing a glance at the girl.

Again Leslie's door opened suddenly, and the two men came out, chatting. Leslie also carried his hat and stick, and glanced interrogatively at Miss Drummer.

"Yes, I'm ready," she said airily.

He paused just the fraction of a second, in which he looked at Mary. She did not respond to the look, but continued work.

"You'd better lunch now, Miss Ellis," he said rather hurriedly. "Good-by, Highlands."

Sir James was engrossed in his tie before the mirror.

"I shall catch you at the lift," he remarked. "We can say good-by downstairs."

Leslie's face was suddenly dark. Sir James surveyed him in the mirror and smiled. And the tall woman with sandy hair, raising her eyebrows just a very little, said:

"Shall we go, Mr. Leslie?"

He followed her out of the room reluctantly.

Highlands left the occupation with his tie and came again with that noticeably light and dapper tread to Mary.

"And you, Miss Ellis?" he asked.

"I'm going to lunch, too."

"Alone? Ought you not to celebrate the first day of a first engagement—which exciting fact I wormed out of my ill-tempered friend?"

"I'm not lunching alone," said Mary, and she gave that schoolgirl chuckle of hers, free and happy.

"Oh, oh!" said Highlands, disconcerted. "Then I will indeed catch Leslie and Miss Drummer at the lift. Perhaps another day—will you—"

But seeing the clock, and remembering the irrevocable brevity of Steven's lunch hour, she sprang up and rushed past him, crying:

"Oh, I'm late!"

"Does it matter so much?" said Highlands, following to the door. "Will he mind?"

She gave herself no time to answer, but flew to put on coat and hat; and when she emerged into the corridor, Sir James was gone.

She thought, when she came out into the street, "How bright the sun is!" The whole day seemed immeasurably more beautiful than when she had left auntie's house to climb to the bus stop that morning. All that had ever hap-

pened had dropped far back, as a landscape drops back behind a racing train. The royal youth of her bearing made many turn to look after her. Supreme confidence, gifted, it seemed to her, with a surfeit of happiness, she hastened along the buzzing street to the meeting place with Steven.

He was standing by the doorway, patiently watching, when she came up. He held a little bunch of violets in his hand, and she knew that he had bought them for her.

They passed in. The place was one of the Cabin restaurants, suitable to their purses, and to the purses of many others apparently, for it was nearly full. Steven, however, had his own particular corner, which, he explained with a touch of would-be careless gratification, was kept for him every day till one o'clock, and to which he piloted Mary. He looked around, and saw that he was escorting the prettiest girl in the restaurant, and if only his heart had been less hungry, his young male's cup of contentment would have been full.

As it was, her smiling mouth turned him sullen; her bright eyes knifed his very soul; he couldn't help watching her unfastening her coat collar, and waiting for the thin white blouse to emerge into sight as she threw the lapels back; watching for her to take up and sniff his violets, which he had laid without a word on the table before her.

"Thank you," she said, with a far-away look.

"Saw them," he mumbled. "Thought you'd like them. What luck?"

"What luck?" Then the question brought her back to contemplation of him. "What luck? Why, the best! The very best!"

"You've got a job?"

"Not only have I got one, but I've started it. I have been working all morning. I started right in—and there was no trouble, no difficulty at all!"

"Where is it?"

"Glen Leslie & Co., Accountants. They asked me to call at nine-thirty, earlier than any of the others."

"Made sure of your valuable services!" he said with an attempt at a jest.

"Seemed like it!" she laughed. "But, you see, all auntie's warnings and groanings about the struggle to get work are nowhere. You see that, don't you? Why, it's easy!"

He did not reply. He was thinking of his own anxieties, started at sixteen. It had not been easy. He picked up the menu card and studied it.

"What're you having, Miss Ellis?"

"I'm ordering my own."

"If you will have it so."

He handed her the card, fingering the uncertain little mustache above his uncertain mouth, his eyes moody and dreaming on her. She was not cruel, only very young in her utter and bland inattention to his soul's needs. She was running her finger down the card, healthy, hungry.

"I'll have fish, and meringues after, and coffee."

He ordered the same.

"You won't be able to go those lengths every day," he told her.

"Of course not. Though I'm getting quite a big salary to start with."

He did not want her to get a big salary to start with; it made him squirm inwardly. But he raised his eyebrows and smiled, which she took for a question.

She told him with easy triumph:

"Two pounds ten!"

Steven did not betray his chagrin and bitter amusement. At her age he had been earning a pound a week, and that had involved two rises since the age of sixteen. His present affluence had been achieved only after years of fighting, heckling, daring, and cringing. In his mind he went automatically into things. She'd live with her aunt, cheaper than he had lived; she'd get a rise quite soon. At his age, if she wasn't married—

why, who knew but what she might be getting—

Who said women's fight was harder than men's? They slipped softly, with smiles, into places where men could not push their way. Two pounds ten!

"What do you think of it?" she challenged.

"Fine!" he responded.

They began on their platefuls of boiled fish. Both were hungry. Steven had learned to make the most of every ounce of the food he paid for. Mary's appetite was not based on calculation, but all the same she was conscious that she was buying a better lunch than she ought to buy. They had not come here to meet and dally with food, like spendthrifts in the richer restaurants, but really to eat it. So they talked little until the meringues had disappeared.

"Is there time for a smoke?" said Mary.

"Quite time, if you don't object."

"Object!" she said with her irresistible chuckle. "I want one, too."

"Ladies don't often smoke in this place."

"Why should you object if I don't?"

"I don't object." He offered his open case to her, and she helped herself. All the same, he was not used to women who smoked in restaurants, and he looked about him a trifle uneasily, to see if people noticed.

"Yes, you do," she said, when she had puffed out the first little cloud of smoke. "You object terribly. Oh, Mr. Hands, what a good thing I am not going to marry you!"

"*You* think so."

"Can't you see it, too?"

"Afraid not. It's difficult for a man to realize it's good to be denied the one thing his whole heart and hopes rest on."

"Don't!" she begged, a little scared by his sudden intensity.

"Very well, I won't. But now you

know it. I've lived for you since the day I first saw you."

"I'm glad you're not going to see me often, then. Because it's a good thing for you, though you may not know it now, that I'm not going to marry you."

"You can't make me see it."

"Take this cigarette." She took it from her lips and surveyed it gravely. "You object to my smoking it here. If I were your wife, you would say that I must not smoke it here."

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Perhaps I should say it."

"I should disobey you. Disobey! What a word!" She made a grimace. "I'm going to do as I like."

"But women can't—"

"Women can."

"A man's judgment about all sorts of things like that is more mature than a woman's."

"You sound clever." She pondered over what he had said. "But you don't cut any ice," she added. "And it wouldn't only be cigarettes in restaurants. There'd be all sorts of things we should fight over."

"I should try to please you—Mary."

"But I'm not at all sure that I should try to please you—Steven."

They looked at each other and laughed a little shyly, since the first names had been spoken for the first time. But in her frankness, some keen lover's sense told him, lay, dead and buried deep, his hopes.

She put the cigarette back. Stuck in the corner of her mouth, it gave her a momentary touch of gamin impudence.

"I feel, Steven, as if I had a bit of the real world in my fingers, given me this morning, to play with. Did you feel like that?"

"When?"

"When you got your first job."

"No. I didn't feel like that. The— the world seemed to play with me." In

his mind he thought, "Yes, kicked me about like a damned football!"

"Then—if I feel like that and you didn't, perhaps the feeling means something. I've got a—a lovely exploring feeling. It's like going out of a house and shutting the front door. You never know what will happen after you've shut the front door! I often think that! One side of the door, it's so dull; and on the other side there may be—just anything. I know something else it's like—it's like beginning to read a new story."

"You'll live and learn."

"That's not entirely original!"

"I don't pretend to be original. I don't pretend to be anything but what I am." And he added savagely, "A humdrum beggar who's been rather too hard up all his life, and who's always wanted things he never gets."

"I feel I'll get the things I want. Don't you?"

He gave her a look that confused her, so that she stammered as she said quickly:

"I do wish it wasn't me you wanted; then perhaps you'd get it. Some other girl would—perhaps—"

"Who ever wants the other girls?"

Mary murmured a little vaguely. She looked away into the restaurant, down the aisle between close-packed rows of tables, toward the street. The sun was shining through the glass upper half of the door. How blithe the spring was! She was happy.

"Will you lend me your fountain pen, Mr. Hands?"

He produced it from a breast pocket, with a hand that trembled a little.

"You've soon dropped calling me 'Steven.' "

"Oh—thank you, Steven. And a bit of paper?"

He always carried a notebook, which he offered to her now. And she began to write.

He thought her a strange girl. It

was in part her strangeness that confused and enamored him. Lunching with him, she had first smoked a cigarette against his wishes; now she had calmly begun to write a note, oblivious once more of what he thought. Other girls—he knew but a few—considering him an eligible young man, considered his tastes, too. He could think of two others whom he had very occasionally taken out to lunch or to a cinema and tea on Saturday afternoons—girls who smiled and chattered and were at their best before him, who would have hastened to agree with him about the smoking of cigarettes by ladies in restaurants, and who would certainly not have borrowed his fountain pen and notebook to write, at lunch, to some one else.

He knew, of course, to whom she wrote. She was in haste to tell some one of her success. Who could it be—but—

"This unknown friend of yours?" he asked, getting a casual amusement into his voice.

She scribbled on, without noticing his interruption.

BEST FRIEND: I've had the luck you said I would. I've got a job with Glen Leslie & Co., Accountants. Listen! It was all so easy. Now I'm there, I feel I'd rather have that job than any other in London. And it all happened because their appointment was fixed earlier than the others I was going to call on.

If I'd time, I'd tell you such a lot about them. I'm Mr. Leslie's secretary. I think he's kind, but I'm not sure. He is awfully powerful—do you know what I mean? Very big, and looking as if nothing could ever change his mind, and as if he'd never have any mercy on any one. I dare say great business men get very hard. I hope he'll never be hard on me. I couldn't help thinking that when I took his letters down to-day.

There's a woman managing clerk. I don't think she likes me. She went out to lunch with Mr. Leslie to-day. Her clothes are lovely. I wonder what her salary is? I envy her place, anyway.

Just as you said, the world is being very good to me.

Good-by. I wish you needed help, so that I could give it, too. MARY ELLIS.

She took Steven's rather bitter stare tranquilly. Handing back his pen, she said:

"I'm writing to that man—you know—who writes to me. I promised to let him know at once, and tell him if I liked my employer and everything."

"Yes," said Hands.

"I'll get an envelope at a shop and post it at once. I shan't have much time for letter writing now, after I get home."

"I should drop unessential letter writing, if I were you."

"This is essential."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"And to him, you think?"

"He says so."

Steven laughed.

"Men like fooling girls."

She jumped up, saying, "You're hateful!" took up her check, and hurried to the cash desk without a backward look at him. Either of the other two girls he remembered would have dallied with their anger and waited to forgive, but there was no forgiveness about the straight set of Mary's shoulders. So he had to run after her, carrying his overcoat, without time to drag it on, to ask for pardon.

He had to walk beside her, pleading, in the street, for several hundred yards, his coat still over his arm, before she relented even a little. And he caught at that little as a starved sparrow flies for a crumb. He abased himself, abused himself. It was bad—bad—being in love like this!

For a man in love, he saw with remarkable clearness. He saw that she was already far removed from him, that there were miles, gulfs, between them.

He was afraid of other men, and full

of rancor against them. There were so many men who had money to burn—money which blossomed into flowers to strew the path, were it never so humble a path, whereon a pretty girl sets her pretty feet in the brief season of her springtime.

Before they parted, he had begged her to allow him to call for her after her work was over, to escort her as far as the corner where she waited for her omnibus. When, forgivingly, she conceded the point, he was uplifted only for a moment or two. He thought:

"How long will it be before some other fellow ousts me?"

He was late and did not care. So was she, but she was quickly to learn that she must care. As she stepped into the lift, Glen Leslie and Miss Drummer stepped in, too. The sandy-haired managing clerk looked at her with a cold and furious surprise, Leslie with a frowning uplift of his brows. And she began to say something, but stopped, her heart beating with a sickening heaviness at the hardness of the man's face. She thought of what she had written of him a quarter of an hour ago—"looking as if he'd never have mercy on any one."

He passed on quickly to his room after a few words to Miss Drummer, and Mary faced the other woman alone.

Georgine Drummer was relentless toward women. Standing on the hearthrug, hands thrust lightly into coat pockets, she said sharply:

"You're late. You're beginning badly. It's my business to speak to you about it, and I tell you frankly that Mr. Leslie doesn't stand irregularities."

"I was lunching with a friend," said Mary; and she wanted to add: "Like you. And I was late, like you."

But she didn't reply further. She went out slowly, took off her hat and coat, and pinned Steven's violets, like a little comfort, to her breast. There was a big mirror in the dressing room,

and she saw in it the mutiny of her face; and while she still stood there, one of the girls who sat and typed in the outer room came smartly in.

She said: "I say, Miss Ellis, hurry! Miss Drummer's calling for you, and I've come to fetch you."

Mary ran out. She felt passionate and looked it, but before the wide-open brown eyes that watched for her, she cooled and began to tremble.

"Mr. Leslie has rung for you twice," said Georgine.

Mary replied, but without spirit: "He hasn't lost much time about it." "If you had lost as little in answering the bell, it would be better for you," said Georgine Drummer.

Mary went into the inner room, and there was Leslie sitting motionless before his desk.

"Yes, Mr. Leslie?" she breathed.

He turned with an alarming suddenness.

"Oh! You've come at last! You were late in from lunch. Why? I might have been here before you, needing you. Why were you late?"

"I forgot the time."

"I won't have any one here forget time." He was sitting steadily facing her, and something in her clear gaze told him her quick thought, which she dared not speak. "Unless they're specially privileged so to do," he added, with a smile that had a sardonic twist in it.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Leslie."

Her heart seemed to beat up in her throat at the continuance of his steady, piercing regard. She felt like a bird wanting to flutter away from a great, determined cat. Her eyes fell before his and wandered about—to objects in the room, to his desk. His clenched hand rested on the desk before him and drew her attention. It was large, strong; it looked as if wrought in iron.

"What made you forget the time to-day?" he said coldly.

"I was lunching with some one, and I was very happy——"

"A pleasant lunch?"

She murmured and nodded.

She was still looking at the hand, which fascinated her, and she thought it closed tighter.

"You have some pretty violets there," said Leslie deliberately.

"Yes. They were given to me."

"So I surmise."

He saw a royal look of anger pass over the girl's face, and flashed a response to it—anger, too.

"Did you lunch with Sir James Highlands?" he asked curtly.

"I did not. I lunched with a friend."

His expression changed. He got up from his chair quickly and stood a full half minute, hesitating.

"Really," he began, "I regret——" and stopped. "Will you sit down, please?" he went on casually. "There are some letters."

He dictated to her for a quarter of an hour. When it was over, he kept her there a few minutes, while again he hesitated, as if there were something he still wished to say. She kept her eyes on her pad and waited, mute.

"That is all," he said at last.

She rose to go, but at the door she heard his voice behind her and turned. He was not looking at her, but spoke over his shoulder.

"You think me very autocratic, Miss Ellis?"

She hesitated.

"Oh-h—" she began, "oh-h, I——"

"And so I am," he said. "And that's that—— I want to see those letters in half an hour."

She passed into the other room, sighing thankfully and saying to herself, aghast:

"What a brute!"

She sent, before she slept that night, yet another letter out into the unknown, confiding:

BEST FRIEND: The first day is over, and it

has not been a nice first day. I told you he would have no mercy on any one, and he was horrible to me because I overstayed my lunch hour. He is not kind. I don't think he has any kindness in him.

He is so hard. He makes one think of rocks and iron and granite. Especially I think of rocks when I look at him, rocks on which the sea has cast drowning people who have been bruised and killed there. I am sure men like Mr. Leslie have hurt many people without caring.

It's a curious thought that a rich man should want to hurt instead of help. I wonder if riches would alter me and make me cruel. I feel they wouldn't. Now that I'm poor and can't help anybody, I imagine I would do so much—so much!—if I had money. I would make all the people I touched happier—all the hard-up people, I mean.

I wonder if you're poor. I suppose not, since you gave such a reward for your ring. No, I don't think you're poor, but you often say my letters make you happier.

Best friend, something happened yesterday. It was what auntie would call my first "proposal." You know, when she was young, girls used to count up their "proposals," and think about them till they were old ladies. I refused mine. I didn't want to be married. I must have a thousand adventures first. There's nothing so glorious as freedom, is there?

Write and tell me what you think. Are you married? I've never asked you that before.

MARY ELLIS.

She was nodding over the letter, half drunk with sleep, and she put her head on her arm and shut her eyes for a moment only.

She awoke; and the smeared page made her chuckle, tired as she was and cold as was the room. She scrawled:

Oh, look! All those blots are because I fell asleep on top of your letter. I was so tired! Do laugh. Good night. Have you laughed? Good night.

CHAPTER IV.

In the morning there was one letter for Mary. Auntie laid it by her side with the old sour grin of disapproval. It answered the note she had written in the Cabin restaurant yesterday. It read:

DEAR LITTLE GIRL: I am one of the first, I hope, to congratulate you on your suc-

cess. What did I tell you? It's not such a difficult world, after all.

This letter, little girl, is not going to concern itself, however, with musings on the world at large. It is written to put you into possession of certain facts.

You're not really a thorough woman of the world, are you? The question is making me laugh a little, but I'm putting it very respectfully. You'll forgive me, won't you?

So, because you are not really a woman of the world—though I'm sure you're quickly going to be, madam—I want to tell you a little about this man for whom you're now secretary—Glen Leslie.

I don't hold any brief for or against him, but there are more against than for him in public opinion. He is, as you surmise, rich. He is not reported to be as hard-hearted as you think him, however, Mary. When you have been longer with Glen Leslie & Co., you'll hear, probably, many stories about him, and the odds are that all the stories to his discredit will be true.

He has the reputation—and he has earned it—of taking his pleasures as he chooses, when he chooses. There have been scandals about him. They're true. You may not hear them. I hope you won't, but if you do, don't disbelieve them. And if you don't hear them, then remember that they exist.

I think, in spite of the way I've reassured you about people in general, that you must learn to walk among them cautiously. I think, after all, I've been rash with my advice. You're very young; you're a new thing in an old, old world. Be very careful of yourself, and about this man Leslie you must make up your own mind.

His reputation is not ideal. And when I have told you that, I hope you will begin to understand.

Good luck, my dear. *BEST FRIEND.*

"Another letter?" said auntie scoldingly.

"They come every morning," said Mary, rereading it, "as you know."

"They may be from some one you know quite well," said auntie; and then, on a brilliant idea: "They may be from Mr. Hands. He's clever enough for anything."

"From Steven?" Mary repeated to herself as she rode on the top of her bus Cityward, a little later. "No."

But the suggestion hovered with her

uneasily. She did not like it. Steven? No! No!

She refused the idea. It was auntie's, born out of her unfathomable wish to see her niece yoked and bound, married at twenty.

"My niece Mary married at twenty," auntie wished to say to her circle. It would be a boast. To this end, and also because she mistrusted the trend of modern young womanhood, she wanted to see Mary set down in a little suburban flat, or a little suburban house, with nothing to do all day, after the dishes were washed, save to wait till Steven came home. And when Steven handed out the weekly housekeeping money, and went for a walk with his wife on Saturday afternoons, and took her to see auntie on Sundays, the old lady would add further:

"My niece has such a good husband."

"My niece Mary" was thinking little of Steven Hands after she had dismissed the suggestion of such utterly alien letter writing in relation to him. As she sat jolting toward Cannon Street, with the letter still in her hand, she was thinking of Glen Leslie. And from him her girlishly half-defined understanding wandered to the curiously attractive managing clerk, with her cool, quiet audacity, her lurking air of privilege, her tailor-made clothes and *ondulé* hair.

She pondered, too, over the voice she had heard over the wire—the voice of Leslie's wife, with the tang of sharpness in it.

She made a triangle of them, contemplative, half shocked, but thrilled.

That day she went out to lunch with a crowd. They filled two tables at a near-by tea shop, and over cups of chocolate and buns, talked consumedly. Their talk fascinated her, so light, so irresponsible, so rash it was, and yet so full of a certain naive worldly cunning which sat oddly on their young years and unmarked faces. It bounced

from theme to theme like a ball, yet it paused to examine each shrewdly. First, they were eager to question the new secretary, to gain her impressions and to put her wise, and in little bursts of friendly confidence they fed her awakened curiosity.

A pale girl, Alma Stone, was the first with information about Miss Drummer.

She said, in a tired twang:

"What d'you think of our Miss Drummer? Isn't she smart and fashionable and clever and lucky? Don't you think so?"

"Luck!" murmured another. "I don't want that kind of luck! We can all have it." Her full lips curled contemptuously.

"She *is* smart," said Mary, "and she is clever and she's lucky to be able to dress so well. But she isn't kind."

"Hey?" said Alma Stone, with a sharp look. "Hasn't she been kind to you, then?" and she gave an expressive glance around the circle of interested faces.

The other girl who had spoken scornfully of "luck" chipped in here.

"How do you expect her to be kind to you, Miss Ellis, when you're picked out as Mr. Leslie's personal secretary, at a salary that's making her think?"

"Oh——" Mary began.

"Don't you think we're jealous of you, my dear," said Alma with her sharp look. "We're not. It's she who's jealous."

"Jealous?" said Mary with pink in her cheeks. "But there've been other secretaries before me."

"Yes, and she's chosen 'em. You're the first one Mr. Leslie's chosen personally. She thinks there's some reason for it. She thinks you've met him before. Has she asked you that?"

"Why—y-yes."

"She would. What did you say? Had you met him before?"

"I only remembered meeting him in

the street close to my aunt's house two or three times."

"And you told her that? You've done it now! I suppose he looked at you when he met you?"

"Oh, as people do," Mary said loftily.

"People? You mean men. You don't need to tell us he looked at you, and he saw your ad in the paper at that address, and he wrote posthaste—that's what happened. He probably made inquiries about you, too."

"There's no limit to the trouble men'll take."

"A man like Mr. Leslie, anyway."

"And our Georgine has smelled it all out, you may take my word for it, my dear. I know she talked a good bit about finding the new secretary to Mr. Leslie before he wrote making your appointment."

"You should have seen the last secretary! Georgine chose her at an employment bureau. She was fifty."

"Georgine has taken awfully good care of Mr. Leslie."

Half intrigued, half repelled, Mary's eyes questioned the several pairs fixed brightly upon her.

The fat girl who had been the second to speak burst out with a little laugh:

"You don't mean you haven't tumbled to the situation, Miss Ellis?"

"Now, Daisy!" said Alma, enjoining caution.

But Daisy ran on:

"She's been here five years, as long as any of us, and she went after Leslie right from the beginning. She hadn't got such good clothes then. I was here, and I know."

"But—" said Mary, "but—Mr. Leslie is married!"

"Oh, that! It cuts no ice with Georgine. She means to be Mrs. Glen Leslie before she's finished. She won't mind walking through a divorce court to get there."

"She'll just put on a new tailor-made and enjoy it."

"He's not so keen on her now, though," said Alma. "He began cooling off a year ago."

"That's what makes her so desperate."

"He's been awfully decent to her—paid her a whacking good salary, and helped her invest her savings, and so on. And she's always going out to lunch or dinner with him, even now."

"She's got the sweetest little flat, too."

"She'll ask you to it, just once, and pump you."

"But—" said Mary, "but—Mrs. Leslie?"

The girls hesitated for a moment. Then one spoke:

"Oh, you ought to see her!"

"Lovely! And her clothes! Oh, she's awfully smart!"

"But as cold and hard as *this!*" said Daisy, touching the marble table top with pudgy fingers.

"Every one says she's never cared for him. They aren't together much."

"She's always about with Mr. Stacey."

"You'll meet Mr. Stacey at the office. Sure to."

"People say she's so unsympathetic and heartless, it's no wonder Mr. Leslie consoles himself."

"I don't believe it. He's that kind of man."

"P'raps he made her heartless," said a shrill little champion of womanhood.

"Don't you believe it! He's not got much in the heart line himself."

"How do you like him, Miss Ellis?"

Again every pair of eyes were fixed brightly upon her.

"He's very hard," said Mary, after a while.

"Oh, you've found that out?"

"Rather wonder he's hard on you, though."

"Bluff for Georgine, p'raps. He knows she'd give you hell if she thought that—"

"There's nothing to think," said Mary, on fire.

"Don't be angry, my dear," begged the good-natured Daisy. "We've seen more life than you have, I'll bet. And we know Mr. Leslie."

"You'll hear things about him, Miss Ellis."

"I have been told so," said Mary rashly.

"Oh-h-h! Who told you?"

"A—a friend of mine."

"Oh-h-h! Who's your friend?"

"Are we likely to see him?"

With her irrepressible chuckle, Mary cried:

"No! You're never likely to see him!"

And they couldn't think why she laughed.

"We'd like to see him."

Mary said to herself, "So should I!" but she didn't reply to them. She was chuckling again.

"You should always share a joke," said Alma. "There are none too many, goodness knows."

A little silence fell. The girls were looking at Mary, summing her up, not unkindly, but all the same noting and envying that gift of hers which made her look royal in a reach-me-down suit.

"Well—" said Daisy, rousing herself with a sigh.

The buns had all been eaten, and the girls were buttoning up their coats and settling their hats. They trooped back to the office, jostling happily through the street, talking, laughing, curious, with their shallow curiosity, about everything they saw. They parted from Mary for the afternoon with the easy affection of their kind, but she saw, groping through their friendliness, the feelers of their inquisitive minds. Their looks implied that they were settling down on their office chairs to watch a real little movie story.

The managing clerk was already at her desk. She had lunched quickly,

alone and early. Her impeccable white shirt, the silk smoothness of her sandy hair, and a kind of luring poise of body that she had, made a picture of queer provocation. She was like an unnaturally demure drawing by a French artist—neat, yet silken, prudish, yet prudent, quiet, yet intensely alive.

She was reading a private note which had just been delivered by hand as Mary entered, and, looking up, she smiled at the girl, slowly, guardedly, but with a graciousness. Then, picking up her telephone receiver, she spoke:

"Mayfair 0001. Hello! That you, Sir James? This is Georgine Drummer replying to your note. Yes, certainly. I think I can, promise what you ask. At nine o'clock. Au revoir."

She hung up the receiver and said, "Miss Ellis," her elbows on the desk, her pointed chin resting on her long white hands. She smiled, still graciously. "Miss Ellis, are you engaged this evening?"

"No, Miss Drummer."

"Then I want to take you home to dinner with me if you'll come. It isn't so far off your route home."

"I—I'd like to. Thanks." And she thought, with a half-pleased, half-repentant stir at her heart, "What those girls said would happen, this is! She doesn't lose much time. I've a good mind to refuse, after all."

Yet, all the same, she wanted to go. The world of little intrigues suggested to her by her colleagues' careless talk was new and held the rich enchantment of the limitless unknown.

CHAPTER V.

Georgine took Mary back with her to a little flat situated centrally enough to be rather expensive, and the little flat itself struck a note of luxury, too. The note of luxury was muted, muffled, but none the less palpable. It was rather like Georgine herself. Had a man seen

her walking barefoot down a slum alley, clad in rags, he would have looked at her just the same and said to himself: "She is wearing crêpe de Chine underneath." Something about her would have expressed it, and that was what the flat said:

"I am wonderful to my intimates."

There was a maid there, a bold, rosy creature who looked at Mary with a bright stare, but who hurried back to dinner preparations directly she had closed the front door. It was Georgine who ushered the guest to a small bedroom done in mauve. Here a gas fire was lighted; the place was warm; a wrap of black satin hung over a chair back.

"I must get into something easy," Georgine said, pointing to the wrap. "I always do. Won't you let me lend you a little kimono for dinner? Then you can lounge. I always lounge. And we'll make ourselves really comfortable. I'm like a man in that. I always do myself well. No little womanly privations for me."

Mary was ready in a gaudy little kimono long before Georgine had swathed herself in the black satin wrapper, and she sat watching the other woman, fascinated. She watched her care of herself, the selection of slippers and stockings, the perfection of the powder dusting, the polishing of finger nails. It was all done with the quickness of experience, the sureness of knowledge, and when she had finished, she was exquisite as a Frenchwoman is exquisite, careful, polished, scented, soft.

They went in to dinner.

Dinner surprised Mary.

"All this for one woman!" she said to herself, regarding the appointments and the cooking. When a bachelor girl asked one to a meal, one expected to go to the kitchen, help to scrape it up oneself, and eat it with makeshift implements. But here was a dinner, per-

fect, like a little restaurant dinner, served on a black polished table with lace mats for napery, garnished with carnations such as made Georgine's desk fragrant, lighted with an easy plenty of long candles, shaded pink. And they drank a light wine, and there were bonbons in the dishes.

Mary said naïvely, on the impulse of the reflection:

"Now I know why you look so soft, so perfect."

Without admitting pleasure, Georgine drawled:

"Why?"

"Because," said the other, "you are always stroked sleek. You are like—oh, you are like a Persian cat that loves cream—"

Georgine broke in: "And because I love it, I get it."

"It's easy to say that, but every girl can't get it."

"We are not concerned with every girl," said Georgine. "Most are fools. The point to me is that I get it, and the point to you is that you can get it." "I?"

"You are so pretty," said Georgine in a slow voice. "You will get all the sweets of life."

"How?"

Georgine laughed.

"Oh, they come for you to choose. To be born pretty is to be born lucky. I say, did you think I was a perfect beast to you the other day?"

"You were hard. So was Mr. Leslie."

"He always is hard," said Georgine after a pause.

She smoked between courses, just a whiff or two at a Russian cigarette in her very long green holder. The rosy maid served them. She was quick at replenishing glasses, and she looked with a half-smiling understanding at the soft flush that rose in the younger girl's cheek.

"A baby!" she thought to herself. "Got no head! A regular baby!"

Georgine, too, looked and noted, and she ordered liqueurs with the coffee, after dinner.

Before the fire it was warm, delightful. They sat amid piled-up cushions on a low divan, feet curled under them, cigarettes in their fingers. The first liqueur Mary had ever tasted came, amber-colored, stimulating, strong. And she was filled through with the sense that this was a lovely evening, delicious.

Georgine was confiding; then rapacious for confidence. But she was kind, soft, feminine about the business.

"Of course," she said, silkily impetuous, staring into the fire, "you've had lots of love affairs. You must have begun them in the cradle. Aren't you engaged? Who's the 'friend' that the girls chipped you about in the dressing room?"

"Oh, he? He doesn't matter."

She thought of Steven and laughed. He would think it rather queer of her to curl up on a divan with black coffee and a gold liqueur and a Russian cigarette, in an extravagant kimono. She knew by the feel of it, like a true woman, that it was extravagant. Poor Steven! The picture would alarm him. The girls he was used to wouldn't do it, nor have a chance to do it. They would want to be sure he approved, first.

She asked Georgine:

"Doesn't it amuse you when women are always trying to please men? Isn't it strange that they think it worth while to coax and blarney and tell fibs just to get some man's approval?"

"It's not amusing," said Georgine quietly. "It's just damn' foolish."

She stared into the fire.

Steven would disapprove of Georgine, who said it was "damn' foolish" to blarney men! With her young satisfied chuckle, Mary marked that.

Georgine said: "But isn't there any one? Surely you've had lovers? There must be some one who cares for you. Don't you care for any one?"

"In a way, yes."

"What way?"

"You mightn't understand. It has been—queer."

With a little secret smile on her mouth, Georgine said:

"But tell me, my dear. Because I do understand and I'm immensely interested."

Mary gave her the story of the letters; and when it was finished, Georgine sank back upon the cushions and asked:

"Is that all?"

"All? Isn't it enough? Don't you think it rather wonderful?"

"Oh, you baby!" said Georgine contemptuously, but not unkindly. "Enough! Ye gods! Is that the kind of thing you're content to feed on all your life?"

"I may meet him."

"Are you in love with him, through his letters?"

"I don't know," said Mary, drawing importantly at her cigarette.

Georgine smiled.

"How funny!" she said.

Presently she laughed.

"Passion by correspondence only," she said idly. "Oh, it is funny!"

"It isn't passion," said Mary, flushing like fire.

Georgine did not reply. She looked at the clock, the hands of which pointed to nine. And she seemed on the alert.

Almost as the clock began to chime, the front-door bell rang. The elder woman raised herself again and looked at the younger, flushed and dreaming in a burrowed nest of violet cushions.

"Wake up, baby!" she said, still with that note of half-kindly contempt. "Chuck up this ink-and-paper creation and take an interest in flesh and blood!"

I promise you, my child, it's far more worth your while."

As she spoke, the brazen maid opened the door and Sir James Highlands walked in.

He was in a dinner jacket, sleek, polished, perfect. With his quick, soundless, dapper tread, he came forward to take the hand that Georgine held out without leaving her divan.

"Here you are!" she murmured.

"Of course I am!" he returned. His look of complete understanding was for her; his look of eagerness, searching, and admiration was for Mary. "You look like a little goddess, with that thing round you, on a throne of purple," he said, keeping the younger girl's hand.

But as soon as he felt its faint, restless stir in his clasp, he released it instantly. He had never caused a woman the least thrill of alarm; they always slid into intimacy with him, hardly knowing the way they went.

Like a habitué of the flat, he selected an accustomed seat and helped himself to a cigarette. The maid brought in more coffee.

Highlands did not talk much. He was contemplative. His eyes took in the contrast of the two girls upon the divan, the litter of cigarette ends in a tray, the bonbon dish beside them, the emptied liqueur glasses; and he looked long at the pink cheeks and bright eyes of the younger girl. Gaudily she was wrapped in her borrowed kimono, but she lent to the garment's riotous show the toning purity of spring. Its blues and greens became less hectic, colder, because she wore it. And yet she was not cold; she looked warm and soft as velvet, like peaches ripening in the sun upon a south wall.

"We were discussing men," Georgine murmured.

"As women always do," he said.

"As men discuss women."

"No," said Highlands, "men don't dis-

cuss women. Men have been taught a decent reserve."

"Miss Ellis is full of romance," Georgine drawled on.

"Oh, no," the younger girl denied in hot defense. "I am most practical."

"You will have to convince me of your practicality," said Highlands gently, looking at her.

He thought to himself, "What a joy!" He was eager to be alone with her, without Georgine's know-all eyes watching.

Highlands had not to wait very long before he was rewarded by what he had come for. At a quarter to ten, Mary uncurled like a kitten from her corner and stood up, and he saw, with a little inward laugh for her babyishness, how sleepy her eyes were.

"I must go home," she said. "Auntie will sit up."

"Oh, do you live with an aunt?" Highlands asked, with some amusement.

"Yes. Near Battersea Park."

"You must get Miss Drummer to show you how to be a real bachelor girl."

Georgine hustled Mary off, with a smile over her shoulder for Highlands. The smile said: "All our arrangements falling out neatly, you see." Her eyes were flickering with a kind of languid amusement. But Highlands, as he answered the smile with the quick response in which no woman ever found him lacking, knew her purpose as well as she knew it herself. He thought, taking another cigarette:

"She's not going to let Leslie get hold of the little girl. No, not if she knows it. I wonder how long they'll be?"

He had not been waiting there more than five minutes before Mary returned, Georgine trailing behind her with the serpentine walk she always affected in a wrapper.

Highlands paid tribute to her effect.

"If Faust were a woman, you'd be

Faust," he said. "That's clumsy, but you know what I mean."

His eyes rested on Mary a moment and traveled back to Georgine, and she knew, indeed, what he meant. She turned away from him to smell some carnations idly.

"Good night, Sir James," Mary said, holding out her hand in its poor glove.

"But I'm coming with you. You couldn't possibly go and find Battersea all alone, at ten o'clock."

"Oh—but—"

"Go on, child," said Georgine, from the desk, where she was messing carnations about restlessly.

Mary was in a taxi with Highlands, driving riverward. She had had a lovely evening and was filled through with drowsy content. Highlands knew it. The girls had been doing themselves well—oh, very well indeed! Women amused him, he thought. Gone was the time when a woman declared, "Any kind of meal's good enough for me." The modern girl knew what was right for her. Georgine, leading a business life, would be turning a bit scraggy now if she'd eaten odd scraps and lived scratch at home. He fell to speculating for a moment as to how old she was. She must be about— But his mind was not long from Mary.

"Is Miss Drummer your dearest friend?" he asked, light and bantering.

"I've not known her long—only two days."

"She's already getting attached to you, though," said Highlands, with a smile in the dimness.

"You've known her a long time?"

"Some five years. She's clever, and the flat's jolly. She does you well, doesn't she? There's nothing haphazard about her."

"I've had a *lovely* time!"

"How nice!" said Highlands, thinking of the liqueur glasses, and suddenly he asked a question quite gravely, for

which he pooh-poohed himself even as he asked it.

"I say, little girl, do you always take liqueurs?"

"What's a liqueur?" said Mary. "That goldy stuff?"

He stared down at her.

"Little innocent!" he said, rather at a loss; then he continued, still on the thread of that serious impulse which he obeyed in spite of himself: "Yes, that was it. Benedictine. She keeps good stuff, too. Was it the first time you've had any, then?"

She owned, "Yes," a trifle ashamed at such a confession.

"Mercy!" said Highlands to himself. "What have we here? And did you like it, Miss Adventures?"

"Only rather. Miss Drummer says it's an acquired taste."

Highlands possessed himself of her hand.

"Why shouldn't I," he thought, "since I'm going to talk to her like a father?"

He held it caressingly, so that even through the glove she felt a sense, electric, indefinable, but disturbing to her feeling of comfortable safety.

"Well, I wouldn't acquire the taste, if I were you," he said; "not just yet, anyway. When you are as old and wicked as Miss Drummer and me, you can begin learning a lot of things. There's time."

"I am twenty."

"I admire the dignified manner of your reproof. And your statement inspires me with respect and awe. Twenty—it's a great age!"

"You're laughing at me!"

Her upturned face, scrutinizing him in the dim-lit cab, was foreshortened deliciously. He had always said that never did a pretty woman look so pretty as when, thus foreshortened, she lifted her face. He was absorbed in looking at Mary.

"You're laughing at me!" she repeated, drawing back.

"And staring at you, I'm afraid," he said, recovering his tone of banter. "I was trying to ascertain if you are really so old, or if you were deceiving me. By Jove! We're over the river!"

"We're nearly home."

"What a shame! There was so much I wanted to say to you. You will have to give me another opportunity of saying it, won't you, since you have destroyed my chance to-night?"

"I haven't destroyed your chance."

"Yes, you have. You took my breath away by being twenty." And then, seriously, he said: "Look here, child, what do you do on Sunday afternoons? Isn't it a great time for going out to tea?"

"Is it?"

"Yes, Miss Adventures. Come and adventure in a new field. Have tea with me in Ebury Street. Let me give you my address." He sought and found a card which he put into her hand. "Come at four o'clock, and have a great deal of jam and chocolates and cream and other things suitable for little girls, will you? No liqueurs."

"I'm sure Steven would disapprove," she thought gladly. "I should like to come," she said.

"Promise to come."

"I must tell auntie first that I shall be out."

"Then tell auntie first."

"You're laughing——"

"Do let me laugh at you just a little. Promise me about Sunday, please."

"I'll ring you up to-morrow."

"Good!" he said, and he was secretly enchanted. Once a girl acquired the habit of ringing one up, acquaintance was easy. And he said good night to her very respectfully and gallantly, on auntie's doorstep, and drove away again over the river.

He rang Georgine's doorbell once more, at eleven. She was still on her divan, her cigarette out, but hanging

between her fingers, her eyes brooding at the fire.

"Well, Madame Mephistopheles," said Highlands, advancing. "I've taken Marguerite home."

"Oh-h! Pouf!"

"You've been getting that little girl to talk, have you, Georgine?"

"Only about her love affairs."

"Has she any?"

"There's some man who writes her extraordinary letters—some man she's never met and isn't going to."

"Love letters?"

"Well, what else could they be? I haven't read them, of course."

"Queer stunt!" said Sir James. "Queer stunt!"

He came and sat down beside the woman on the divan.

"Jolly finger nails you've got!" he said, stroking her long, slim hand absently.

She did not trouble to move her hand; neither did she notice his touch.

"Has she made a sort of image of the fellow?" said Sir James. "Hero worship, and all that? You know how I mean. What exactly do they do?"

"They write and confide in one another. And he gives her advice."

"Oh, Lor'!" said Sir James. "Does she take it?"

"She swears by it. She's probably sitting down at this moment telling him about me and her evening here."

"I wonder what conclusions he'll draw!"

Highlands laughed. That tickled him. He looked at Georgine humorously.

Suddenly his face clouded. He got up.

"It's all very well, but you'd got no business to try to get her into a state to talk, don't you know? A little girl like that!"

"Good night!" said Georgine, with the utmost casualness. "Go, as you're getting tiresome."

Highlands left her sitting there. But,

"I know you!" was his parting shot, laconic, good-humored. "I know you!"

He walked home under the starlight, thinking:

"I wonder if that girl really is writing to some chap she's never seen, telling him all about Georgine and me? Wonder what the fellow's like. Literary bloke—full of diseased imagination—Pah!"

Mary was indeed, at that very moment, sitting in her cold bedroom, slipped, dressing-gowned, her hair dipping over her shoulders and worrying the ink-wet page. She was writing:

And her flat is lovely. And—don't be shocked!—I believe I know what it feels like to begin to be drunk. I wasn't, of course. I was only happy. But I told her lots and lots more than I wanted to tell her—about us, you know. People think us so stupid. I would rather keep us for ourselves, wouldn't you? But she can wheedle.

Oh, and a man, Sir James Highlands—I've met him at the office—came in as if he was perfectly used to being there, and he drove me all the way home in a taxi. What richness!

Do you see that smudge? My hair did it. It keeps dropping over my shoulder. Good night.

MARY.

She was a little early at the office next morning. She had been thinking all the way of the answer she was to make to Highlands. She had meant to drop into a public call office, yet was undecided until the last moment what she should say. Georgine's little room was empty when she entered it. She thought:

"Here's luck! No one will hear. The girls would be *so* silly if they knew," and she lifted the receiver from its hook with a quick hand.

She got the number directly, and a sedate person was speaking.

"Is that Sir James Highlands?" she queried, smiles in her voice.

"No, madam," said the sedate person at the other end of the wire. "I'm Sir James Highlands' man."

"I want Sir James himself," and,

pleased to be arrogant, she added, "Say Miss Ellis."

Highlans kept her waiting barely a moment before she heard his "Good morning, Miss Adventures. You are coming on Sunday, aren't you?"

"Yes, please. At four?"

"At four. How are you after your revelry?"

"Ever so jolly, thank you, Sir James."

"That's good——"

"Good morning," said Leslie harshly behind her.

She swung round, gasping. Then, before she could correct the impulse, she hitched the receiver scurryingly on its hook, much as a frightened child caught in the wrong. He made her feel like that, standing there, seeming to fill the room. Her eyes swept to his face; it was granite, grim, hard, and his look surveyed her from head to toe. She felt a force, as if she were clashing with an element too strong for her, before she saw that he was not alone.

A small woman stood beside him, su-

premely elegant, cold, precious, pretty. The breath of violets came from her; she gave the impression of being wrapped in fur, in things that spelled money. She began to walk in, nodding to the girl who stood there, and she was saying:

"I told Frederic to pick me up here. It's too bad to invade you so early, Glen."

"Doesn't matter," said Leslie. "What time'll Stacey be here?"

They passed into the inner room. Left to herself, Mary was saying in her chaotic mind:

"That's Mrs. Leslie, I suppose."

But hardly had she reached that conclusion when the door of Leslie's room opened and shut once more. He came out, leaving his wife on the other side.

"Miss Ellis."

She faced him, stirred to the depths by the challenge in his hard voice; and he came close and, looking down at her, said squarely:

"Did I hear you telephoning to Sir James Highlans just now?"

TO BE CONTINUED.





GLADYS

By William Johnston

Author of "Limp," "The Yellow Letter," etc.

ROMANCE, ladies and gentlemen, is masculine, decidedly more masculine than feminine. In the very origin of its name, it is peculiarly man's. All the delightful tales in that language which the word perpetuates are stories of men—of their destinies, their ambitions, their battles, their adventures, their conquests. It is only in these latter days of triumphant feminism that the unthinking have come to regard romance as essentially the property of womankind.

The woman, it is true, in youth—in that brief period when nature arms her with softness and beauty and lure—knows something of romance, either realized or at least dreamed of, but all too soon matrimony, motherhood, domestic cares, business life, combine with the onerous duties of ever-changing fashions in clothes to erase quickly and completely from the feminine mind all memories of and tendencies toward romance.

Every man, on the contrary, throughout his whole life secretly dwells in a land of romance, beyond the walls of which he seldom if ever permits even his most intimate acquaintances to pass. Faithfully he worships at his hidden shrine, and the older he grows, the more eagerly he scans the horizon each day, hoping to see the fairy hand of romance beckoning him to adventures.

At twenty, for the most part, his thoughts are on a career, on earning a livelihood, on making a name for himself, on accumulating a fortune. He dare not trust himself then even to think of romance. It remains a forbidden, though far from forgotten desire. When he has matured, after he has attained financial success, he finds himself filled with a vague dissatisfaction. He is tormented by the lack of romance in his peaceful married life. He feels that somehow life has cheated him. Safe behind the doors of his private office, he finds relief from the monotony of business and from the pallid domesticity of his home life by dreaming of romance—and sometimes his dreams come true.

Yet the very last place in the world that one would look for the beginnings of romance was in the offices of Trumper & Max that morning. Even a callous book agent, entering, could not have helped reading the news of last night's catastrophe in the pall of gloom that overhung the place. Out in the little dark cubicle which the two partners were accustomed to speak of as "our outer offices," Miss Custis, telephone girl, stenographer, and office staff all in one, nervously powdered her nose twice as often as usual, as she mournfully meditated on her three weeks' wages still unpaid—and new jobs in

May as scarce as spinsters' beaux. In the "inner offices," a single ten-by-twelve room, with the door closed against all callers, sat the pessimist of the partnership, Henry Trummer.

He was alone. His hat was jammed down on his forehead. The half-chewed cigar between his stained lips was unlighted. The desk on which his feet were elevated held the morning's mail unopened. All about him was a disordered litter of newspapers, which recorded the blasting of the firm's hopes. Last night the comedy on which he and Charley Max had counted so confidently to introduce them auspiciously to the Big Street had had its first production. For both of them, it was the climax of a persisting ambition. From boyhood, they both had been fascinated by the game of amusing the fickle public. Trummer had left a Wisconsin farm to run a side show at the county fair. From the rural circuits, he had moved on to the amusement beaches, ever getting nearer and nearer his goal, the production of a play on Broadway. Charley Max had emerged from the great East Side of the metropolis riding the same hobby. He had been an usher in a theater, a song booster, a ticket speculator, and a cabaret manager. Three months before, he and Trummer had pooled issues and, paying the rent of an office for six months in advance, had set about producing "Laughing at Love" with that meager capital popularly known as a shoe string.

Somehow—they hardly knew how themselves—they had managed to get together scenery, costumes, and cast. Somehow they had managed to raise thirty-five hundred dollars in cash to pay the first week's rent of a Broadway theater. And now the newspapers, one and all, united in declaring their play a grotesque failure. Not a single critic said one kind word for the plot, music, lyrics, situations, acting, scenery, jokes.

Each article that Henry Trummer read only made him more disconsolate. They had made a superhuman effort and had failed. Their money was gone. Their credit was exhausted. Their play was hopeless. They were through.

The door burst open, and Charley Max entered, whistling cheerfully. Trummer looked at him blackly, aghast at such unseemly spirits. Like most partners, they were opposites, attracted to each other in the first place by their utter unlikeness. Trummer was tall and thin. He had hoarded his money penny by penny. He had traveled from coast to coast in the wake of fairs and circuses. It was only in the big cities that he did not know his way around. In a restaurant, he seemed always at a loss to know what to do with both his napkin and his hands. Max, on the contrary, had never been farther north than Yonkers. What money he had accumulated had been by bolder moves—by getting options and selling them, by running graft programs, in a hundred different ways more or less honest, but mostly less. When in funds, he was a liberal spender. He felt perfectly at home even in the St. Bilk Hotel and could order a dinner with the manner of a wine agent.

"Well," he chuckled, as he saw Trummer's face, "we pulled a flivver, yes?"

"I felt it comin'," replied his partner lugubriously. "We'd ought to have had a try-out on the road, like I said."

"You don't learn nothing from way stations," retorted Charley. "For me, if I've got to die, give me a Broadway funeral every time."

Trummer shook his head sadly.

"You've got the wrong dope. The more that knows of your failure, the worse it is."

"Nix on that stuff! Keep the public hearin' about you, even if they only hear that you've failed. Anything to get your name known—that's me."

"Well, anyhow, we're through."

"Where'd you get that?"

Trummer waved a discouraged hand toward the paper-littered floor.

"It couldn't be worse. Every paper in town pans us hard. H. & K. called up a'ready to say we gotta close Saturday night. They want the theater for another piece."

"Them bloodsuckers ain't losin' no time," admitted Charley ruefully. "It was only half past five yesterday evening we paid them thirty-five hundred."

"You can't blame them much, with the notices we got."

"Sure they had to do it. That's only business."

"What's more, them notices'll kill the show. We won't pull in enough real money to pay advertising bills."

"We should worry," said Charley carelessly, as he seated himself and began looking through the mail.

Most of the letters contained unpaid bills, which he promptly disposed of by dropping into the waste-paper basket.

"It ain't as if we were a one-string fiddle," he presently commented. "There's that piece of Strasser's we got the rights to."

"Much good that does us!" objected Trummer. "It'd take twenty or twenty-five thousand good iron men to put that on, and we're clean. There ain't a century between us."

"What of it?" Charley almost shrieked at him. "We still can make a front, can't we? Ain't our rent paid for three months yet? Ain't we both got good clothes?"

"Yes, and no car fare," observed Trummer cynically.

"That part's fixed all right, too," announced his partner. "Didn't I stop off and see Harry Edler at the New Grand this morning? He begins to-day slipping me seventy-five a week to handle the publicity for his new show. That's enough till we get our new piece on."

"That'll be never," objected Trummer gloomily. "Where are we going to dig up twenty thousand?"

"Somebody's got it. We'll get it."

"Show me."

For a moment or two silence reigned, while Trummer mournfully meditated on his lost savings and Charley thoughtfully studied a pamphlet he had found in the mail. Suddenly the optimist's face lighted up.

"I got it!" he cried jubilantly.

His partner, recognizing a note of new and honest enthusiasm in his voice, looked up expectantly.

"Listen here once, Henry!" cried Charley Max, his excitement growing as he read. "I got it here—the big idea! This paper here is a classified list—sent out by one of them houses that address letters and circulars. Hundreds of names they got for sale, all classified. Looka this once—this—under 'investment prospects' it is—look!"

He pushed the pamphlet across the desk, and Trummer, at the place indicated, read:

NAMES AND POST-OFFICE ADDRESSES OF:

32,822 prominent, wealthy, executive business men.

399 millionaire cattle, land, and ranch owners.

1,002 wealthy heirs and heiresses.

4,629 individuals paying taxes on \$100,000 and over.

4,843 millionaires.

Price furnished on application by letter or phone.

Dejectedly Henry Trummer tossed back the pamphlet with a weary sigh, as he remarked:

"Why make it worse by readin' about them that's got it?"

"Don't you see it?" Charley shrieked at him. "There's a list of four thousand eight hundred and forty-three millionaires, and we can get it—their names and addresses! Four thousand eight hundred and forty-three millionaires! Think of it!"

"Getting their names ain't getting their money," sniffed Trummer scornfully. "I've met millionaires. They're men that know how to hold on to money; that's all. Swell chance you have of separating any of them from enough to put on a show!"

"Why not?" insisted Charley, somewhat crestfallen, but still hopeful. "I made book once at the track for six weeks. Two things it taught me. All men are suckers sometimes and everything's got to average. With that many millionaires to pick from, there's bound to be one sucker among them."

"Supposin' there is—which is he?"

"We'll fish for him," announced Charley, with sudden decision.

"Sending out circulars, eh?"

"No," said Charley thoughtfully. "We got to have better bait than that."

He sprang up and began rummaging through a cabinet filled with photographs of actresses and actors, arrived or somewhere on the way. Picture after picture he tossed carelessly aside. At last he found one that seemed to suit him.

"See," he said, as he held it up for his partner's inspection.

"Gussie Smalz," said Trummer, his hard face softening into pleasanter lines as he recognized the photograph.

Gussie was a blonde, a really blonde, with two great braids of flaxen hair wound neatly around her shapely head. Her lips were full and daintily curved, and in her great, deep, blue, baby eyes, even in her photographs, was a half-frightened, half-appealing look that made every man who ever saw her once her friend. Twenty-six or twenty-eight she was, but now, and for the next ten years, she could pass for eighteen.

Trummer's face lost some of its gloom as he studied the picture, and his acute and not too meticulous mind began to sense what was passing in his partner's mind.

"Get me?" cried Charley, his enthu-

siasm reviving at the first sign of his partner's interest. "We send for this list of four thousand eight hundred and forty-three millionaires. We get these guys' names and addresses. We got twenty pictures here—no, nineteen. We pick out nineteen names. Miss Custis, out there, writes each of them names a sob-stuff note. Get me? Orphan—great dramatic chance—needs advice—has a chance to star in new musical comedy. Not typewriting—just like a girl would write."

"Well?" said Trummer judicially.

"Winds up by saying she needs a backer."

"That's where you scare 'em off."

"Nix. Remember she's an orphan. She's all alone. Tell 'em of the enormous profits 'Floradora' made. Get in the personal touch. If the guy is in the clothing business, her dad sold clothing. If it's a rancher, he was a what do you call 'em?"

"I don't see no millionaire falling for that hatchet-faced Miss Custis," objected Trummer.

"All she does is write the notes. It's Gussie's picture we send 'em. Get me?"

Trummer thoughtfully studied the photograph of Gussie Smalz that his partner held up for his inspection. At last he slowly nodded his head in approval.

"She's got that cuddly look that gets all the men," he said slowly, "but—"

"But what?" eagerly questioned Charley.

"Gussie ain't no name to conjure with—Gussie Smalz."

"We'll call her"—Charley hesitated as he mentally ran over a list of feminine names—"we'll call her Gladys Ward. A name ain't nothing to a comedy skirt. They change 'em every year, anyhow. With a good part in a twenty-five-thousand-dollar show, Gussie Smalz would go a lot further than changing her name."

"Gladys Ward's all right," decided

Trummer. "That name's got class. Are you sure Gussie'll stand for it?"

"Gussie needn't know nothing about it yet. We got her pictures here—nineteen of 'em—and if we get one of them four thousand eight hundred and forty-three millionaires nibbling—well, just leave that to me and Gladys."

II.

The bigger a man's place among men, whether it be in science or in finance, in bridge building or in banking, the more closely he conceals from his fellow men his secret yearnings for romance. The modern code of success demands a certain amount of dignity, customary or assumed, as the proper guise for a man of affairs to present himself in to the world. Only the persistent student of human nature, after continued research, at last decides that all male beings are pretty much alike. He gets to know that the man who dominates Wall Street, like every other husband, is afraid of his wife; that the bishop would really enjoy using a little profanity on the golf course; and that most staid business men, if put under oath, would have to admit that when spring came, they either tried to write poetry—or wished they knew how to.

Yet, even admitting that all men are influenced by the same longings and desires, a Laura Jean Chambers would hardly have selected as a candidate for romance Joseph W. Mills, as he sat shirt-sleeved in the best room of the only hotel in the little mining town, running through a bundle of mail that his secretary had forwarded him from his Denver office. He was a big man, six feet two and broad. His black hair, left untrimmed overlong, was thinning and was streaked with gray. Days and years spent in the open, seeking to wrest a fortune from Mother Nature's treasure chests, had left his face and neck a crissed-crossed web of perma-

nent tan. That his search for silver and gold had been to some extent successful was evidenced by the massive chain across his waistcoat, with its pendant nugget and the two-carat diamond screwed into the bosom of the flannel shirt he wore. The sombrero flung carelessly on the bed, stained and scuffed as it was, had cost, when it was new, almost as much as a débutante's Easter headgear.

At the moment, he was engaged in the unromantic occupation of catching up with his mail. There were letters from banks, from assay offices, from mining engineers, from railroads, from mining companies other than his own, to all of which he gave the acute and concentrated attention that marked his course in all business matters.

The next to the last letter he picked up was from the little Colorado town where he had been born and where he still lived—when he was home. A glance at the envelope told him that it was from "mother," the title he always gave his wife, although their twenty-two years of married life had been childless. If he had stopped now to picture her, his vision would have been of a placid, middle-aged woman, living contentedly in the big house he long ago had built on the old farm, dressing a little more expensively than her neighbors, dominating in local church and social circles, quite accustomed to his long absences, inclined, when he was at home, to pester him about his carelessness in dress, his nonattendance at church, and the fact that he took an occasional drink.

As he gave "mother's" letter a hasty glance, he saw at once that it contained nothing of importance—the usual sentences, the tittle-tattle of the farm and village—so he tossed it aside half read and picked up the last letter. He noted curiously that it was addressed in a woman's handwriting and that it was postmarked from New York. He could

think of no woman there who would be writing to him. As he brought the envelope closer to his eyes to study the handwriting, a faint odor of some delicate perfume drifted into his nostrils.

Romance, long buried beneath domesticity and the burden of business cares, emerged suddenly.

Boyishly thrilled at the prospect of reading a message from a woman as yet unknown, from a woman in far-off New York—the wonderful city he always had intended to visit, yet somehow never had—Joseph Mills eagerly tore open the envelope.

"Dear Stranger Man," the missive began.

As he read these first words, Joseph Mills' weather-tanned face turned a deeper hue. With a caution born of years of matrimony, he looked up to make sure that the door was closed and that there were no spying eyes. He even got up to test the key in the lock; then, seating himself on the bed, he gave himself unreservedly to the pleasure of reading the letter, which ran:

DEAR STRANGER MAN: I wonder if you have a daughter, and if she, like me, some day will be left alone in the world.

Why I am writing to you I don't know. I saw your name the other day, and it seemed so familiar. I can't help wondering if I did not know you in the days, long ago, when I was a little girl out West. You see my father, like you, was in the mining business.

He has been dead now for years, and when I was nineteen—that was three years ago—my mother died, too. Then I found that all our money was gone, and that I was all alone in the world and penniless.

What could I do? I went on the stage and—oh, no, I didn't fail. I've been wonderfully successful. Think of it, I've only been on the stage three years, and here I am, at twenty-two, offered the star part in a big new musical comedy.

How I wish I had some one like you—a business man—to advise me. You see the producers expect me to put up the money for the production—twenty-five thousand dollars, they say it will take. That's the custom, you know. There's one man who would advance me the money, if— Well,

6

I just can't. He's such a horrible person. And I don't know what I ought to do. If I could only borrow the money! These musical comedies bring big returns. "Floradora" made over two million dollars.

I don't know why I am writing you this silly note and sending you my picture. I guess it's because I am so tired and blue and discouraged. Here I am, with the voice and the looks and the experience—the opportunity—everything but the money, and no father to go to for it. How I wish you were here in New York where I could talk it all over with you and ask you what to do! Do you ever come to New York? If you do, be sure to let me know, won't you? I'm leaving this hotel in a day or two. It's too expensive for a young actress out of a job. I'm giving you the address of Trummer & Max, the big theatrical producers. They always know where I am, and will forward my mail. Do write to me, won't you, and tell me what to do? How I wish, dear stranger man, I had a father like you, so I could sign myself.

Lovingly your daughter, GLADYS WARD.

With mingled feelings of jubilance and distrust, Mills carefully folded up and put in his pocket this form letter No. 8, the joint product of several hours of effort on the part of Charley Max and Miss Custis, and reached for the big, flat package he had hitherto disregarded, supposing it contained a mail-order catalogue or a pamphlet on mining machinery. As he tore off the wrapper and looked on the soft face of Gussie Smalz, alias Gladys Ward, an involuntary exclamation of admiration burst from his lips.

"She's sure pretty and sweet," he said to himself. "I guess she means it, all right. A girl with a face like that couldn't do nothing mean."

He propped the photograph up on the dresser, where he could study it, and gave himself up to reflection over his misspent past, regretfully recalling his uneventful life, bare of romantic incident. Married at twenty-two to a neighbor girl, hardly in all the years since had he had any acquaintance with women—certainly not with actresses. He had been too busy trying to make

money to seek opportunity, and hitherto none had come to him. The few women he knew were the wives of neighbors or business acquaintances—middle-aged, shapeless, comfortable women like "mother," with little interest or small talk for men. Chances to know women of any other sort never had come to him, beyond passing pleasantries with hotel stenographers and waitresses in short-order restaurants.

Never in all his life had he even spoken to an actress, although the theater for him had ever had a compelling lure. "Going to a show" was his favorite pastime whenever he was in a town away from home. Often he had speculated on what it must be like behind the scenes. Often, too, he had looked on from afar with envy at a merry theatrical party in some hotel dining room, wishing he could find some plausible excuse for joining it. Women of the stage for him had a wonderful fascination—their looks, their manners, their clothes, their conversation being so utterly different from that of the sort of women with which he was familiar.

"There are certainly some good lookers among 'em," he would say to himself, "and, by gosh, good dressers, too!"

Above all things, he liked "a good dresser." At various times, as wealth had flirted auspiciously with him, he had been seized with the ambition to see "mother" in fine raiment. Time and again he had insisted on buying her pretties—a sealskin coat, fine silk dresses, once even a diamond necklace—striving in his blundering way to make a Hebe out of his Martha, but with ill success. "Mother" liked her diamond necklace best when it was safe in the village-bank vaults, and most of the time the expensive gowns he bought her reposed, carefully wrapped in tar paper to keep out the moths, in her commodious clothes presses.

"Gladys sure can wear clothes right," he muttered softly, gazing for the twen-

tieth time at the half-length portrait before him, posed as it was, with all the skill of the professional, to show the charm of the girl's face, while at the same time it disclosed to the fullest the graceful lines of her figure.

Lighting a fresh cigar, and another and another, Mills sat there feasting his eyes on Gladys. In his mind's eye, he saw himself in a box watching her performance on the stage. He pictured himself, after the performance, going behind the scenes to get her and whisking her away in a taxicab to some big restaurant, where there would be lights and music. He imagined himself listening to her sparkling wit and laughing at her merry jests as he feasted his eyes on her beauty. And what a joy it would be to him, too, to escort her to the stores and shops and to the jewelry places, and watch her buy whatever her heart desired.

He rose abruptly and crossed over to the chair on the back of which his coat was hanging. From the inner pocket, he brought forth a bank book enriched that very day by the sale of his mining properties and thoughtfully studied his balance. Apparently satisfied with what he read there, he rose quickly and pressed a button for a bell boy. Forthwith he dispatched two telegrams. One of these, addressed to Mrs. Joseph Mills, stated concisely that he had been called to New York on important business and would probably be away for several weeks. To the other, addressed in care of Trummer & Max, he gave more thought. In its finally approved form it read:

MISS GLADYS WARD: Arrive Thursday. Expect you to dine with me St. Bilk Hotel at seven. Ask for me at desk.

He was about to sign his name in full when his customary caution reasserted itself in spite of his overwhelming craving for romance, and after a moment's hesitation, with a grim smile, he signed, "Your loving dad."

III.

"And if it ain't the right one, where do I get off?" protested Gussie Smalz tearfully.

They had been arguing for an hour in the office of Trummer & Max. Both the partners were there, and even Miss Custis had been called in to persuade Gussie that the unauthorized use of her pictures was perfectly proper. She had run the gamut of emotion from wrath and righteous indignation to tears and reproaches. At first she had declared positively that she would have nothing to do with meeting any millionaire entrapped by any such a method. Gradually she was weakening, as the partners painted the glowing possibilities for her if she carried out their program, but she was still protesting.

"You can read, can't you?" snapped Charley Max impatiently. "You women ain't got no sense. Nineteen names we sent out letters to. You got it here—the list. All you got to do is to go up to the desk and look at the register and see for yourself which name off the list is signed there."

"You hadn't no business using my name that way and sending out letters and everything!"

"We didn't use your name," interjected Henry Trummer. "We signed them all 'Gladys Ward.'"

"And you want me to take her name."

"It ain't anybody's name."

"You're an actress, ain't you?" persisted Charley.

"It's a chance for you to star," added Trummer.

"And he's a millionaire," suggested Miss Custis. Personally she was much concerned in seeing some real money come into the office.

"Sure he's a millionaire," said Charley, holding out the list from which he had selected the nineteen names for her to see. "Look for yourself."

Gussie took the paper from his hand and appeared to be studying the names he had pointed out. In reality, her thoughts were far away from millionaires and footlights and all the sort of subjects that Trummer & Max knew anything about. She was thinking that in the last eight weeks she had only drawn one week's salary, and that the board for herself and her little three-year-old son was two weeks overdue. And besides, there was George, her husband, ill and alone and all but penniless, away out there in Colorado, desperately fighting the dread lung trouble, her George, whom she had promised that she would send ten dollars a week to out of her savings and her salary until such time as he was strong and well again and able to work for her and for their little son. Thus far she had not failed him, even though she had had to pawn what jewelry she had, even to her wedding ring. Posing for photographers, for artists, working as a fashion marionette till she was so weary she could hardly stand, singing for two hours each evening in an uptown cabaret, thus far she had managed to keep going somehow, and each week to send off a cheery little note with ten dollars inclosed.

But now summer was at hand. The photographers would soon be closing down. The artists would all be away. There would be no more fashion shows. Hardly any new plays would be put on until fall, and even the badly paid summer-stock companies were already overcrowded with actresses of bigger reputation than she. Summertime! Vacation time for most folks—just summertime for her! Any way that she looked at it, her situation seemed desperate, and besides—there was George.

"All right," she said. "I'll go through with it."

"Good!" said Trummer. "And now let's don't make no bulls. Charley you

know the list by heart. You get a taxi, see, and take Gussie to the hotel. She waits outside. You go to the desk and find out which millionaire it is and post Gussie. Then you beat it."

"Great!" cried Max.

"That'll be better," admitted Gussie.

"You come here to the office," said Charley, "at six-thirty sharp. Take that third-act gown with you and doll up."

"But bring it back to-morrow," cautioned Trummer.

So, four hours later, Charley Max rushed excitedly up to the taxi in which Gussie awaited his report, all "dolled up" in the third-act gown.

"It's him!" he whispered tensely. "Joseph Mills, the mining millionaire, he is, from Colorado. Here's a half dollar. Stick with him this evening, but break away at eleven o'clock and phone me how it come out, that's a good girl, yes? I'll be at the office waiting."

As Gussie entered the hotel, Charley Max dismissed the taxi. He longed to loiter there and a little later to take a stroll through the dining room, to see for himself how his great plan was succeeding. There were two reasons for his not doing so. He had less than ten dollars in his pocket—or, for that matter, anywhere else—and furthermore Trummer had cautioned him to take no chances on being seen about the St. Bilk Hotel.

"If that guy spots you trailing Gussie, it'll be all off. Them millionaires are all foxy, and he may scent a plant. You beat it and leave it all to Gussie."

Regretfully Charley complied with his partner's advice. Trummer long ago had gone home to the wife and family he had somewhere up in the Bronx. Charley Max was unmarried. His only home was a furnished room, the quality of the furnishings depending on the present condition of his finances. Just now the room was small and the less said about its furnishings

the better. Where was there for him to go? He had no money to spend. He did not feel in the mood for watching other managers' shows, even though his card would have admitted him free. Disconsolately he returned to the office to cheat himself at Canfield, while he anxiously awaited Gussie's report.

It was nearly midnight before his phone rang. When eleven o'clock had come and gone without a word from Gussie, the perspiration broke on Max's forehead. He became too nervous to shuffle the cards. His head began to ache. The suspense was terrible, agonizing. He paced and repaced the floor. At the ringing of the bell, his face went white, but he hastened to answer.

"Yes, yes?"

"It's me—Gladys Ward."

"Yes, yes?" His voice trembled so he could hardly make himself heard.

"He's a live one, all right," came the girl's voice. "He just slipped me a couple of centuries as he put me in the cab after dinner—to get hats with, he said."

"Where are you now?"

"I'm up home."

"Why didn't you telephone me before?"

"I was waiting till folks went to bed, so they wouldn't overhear."

"He likes you—yes?"

"He's crazy about me. He calls me 'daughter' already."

"Fine, fine!"

"He's coming to your office at two to-morrow. He says, if the play's any good, he'll back me in it. Good night. I'm all in."

Trembling all over as with deep emotion, Charley Max hung up the receiver and did a tango step over to his desk, where lay the list of "millionaires' names and addresses."

"Them lists are great!" he announced to the solitude about him. "With four thousand eight hundred and forty-three

millionaires to pick from, there was bound to be one sucker. That there law of averages never fails."

IV.

Almost always, in its realization, romance is a disappointment. Like all of our ideals, it exists only within our own imaginations. Whenever we seek to draw so close to the fickle creature that we may lay hands on her and have her for our very own, she proves to be but a painted mask, beneath which are hidden the unpleasant lines of stern reality. It jarred Joseph Mills' sense of the fitness of things that Gladys Ward said "ain't," despite the fact that he used the word himself. Even though he was little experienced in the fabrics of which women's clothes are created, he sensed the shoddiness of the third-act gown, without realizing that he was even thinking about it.

But, even so, he would have romance. For the next few weeks, he flung himself whole-heartedly into the maelstrom to which his meeting with Gladys had brought him. He forgave her slips in English, choosing to remember only the soft loveliness of her eyes and to delight in the joyous flippancy of tongue and philosophy that made her different from the women he knew out West. And true to his promise to her on the first evening of their acquaintance, he became the backer of the play that Trummer & Max had provided for her.

Soon not one, but many glimpses behind the scenes of the great play world were his. Quickly he met a galaxy of Broadway brilliants—actors, actresses, playwrights, managers. Word that there was a new angel on Broadway—a mining millionaire—spread like molasses spilled among flies. He found himself being feasted and flattered, presented with theater boxes, invited to gambols and teas, slapped on the back by comedians, smiled on by pretty dan-

ses—*and he liked it, or at least enjoyed the novelty of it.*

He found himself caught in a mad whirl, ordering evening clothes from a Fifth Avenue tailor, dancing in midnight cabarets, eating scrambled eggs at four in the morning, chattering small talk with all manner of player folk, letting himself go in every direction with a zest quickened by his long years of arduous and uninteresting work. Even though he would not admit it to himself, most of his illusions vanished, even the glamour of the stage disappearing with his second or third visit behind the scenes, but in spite of it all, he kept determinedly on in his joyous adventure.

Trummer & Max he measured up properly at his first meeting with them. Women may have been strangers to him, but Joseph Mills knew men. "Ambitious pikers," was his classification of them. Only the softness of Gladys' eyes kept him from taking the first train home as soon as he laid eyes on the partners. He agreed to listen to the reading of the play they talked about. Strasser, the author, read it in a hotel suite hired for the occasion, with only Mills, Trummer, and Max—and, of course, Gladys Ward—for an audience.

Against his will, the Westerner found himself believing in the play: The idea was novel, the situations were excellently worked out, the music was catchy, and the leading rôle just the sort of a part that the girl could play well.

"What'll it cost to put it on?" he asked abruptly.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," said Trummer.

"Maybe thirty," said Charley Max, whose motto was to get it while it was coming.

"All right," said Mills. "I'll put up the money. Here's a thousand to bind the bargain. We'll share fifty-fifty. I'll write the receipt."

Just how it happened after that

neither Trummer nor Max ever quite understood. The die cast, Mills plunged into play producing with the vigorous energy he always had used in business. He decided all the questions that came up, using the partners as office boys. Not a cent of his money did they lay hands on, except the first thousand dollars. He drew up a tight contract and made them sign it, giving him the say in everything. Trummer & Max picked out the cast they wanted. Mills made the contracts with the players, amazing both his partners by the smallness of the salary list he turned in.

"He ain't from Colorado," complained Charley Max, a quick touch for some money having failed utterly. "He's from Missouri. He wants to be shown every time."

"You got to hand it to him," commented Trummer admiringly. "He never lets go of a dollar till he sees where it's going."

"Yes," sniffed Max, "and when it's coming back."

Before long, Mills found himself busier than he ever had been out West. There was a theater to arrange for, the cast to select, the scenery to be painted, the properties to be provided, the gowns to be contracted for, the "paper" to be designed and printed, the costumes to be created, the advertising to be arranged for, the orchestra to be hired, and, always, rehearsals, rehearsals, rehearsals. The work delighted him, serving as a salve for his conscience, but for the fact that it gave him very little time to enjoy the society of Gladys Ward. There were so many affairs demanding his attention, and she was rehearsing so constantly, that almost the only time they could find to meet was after rehearsals, when they customarily took supper together. Somehow, too, the girl managed most of the time to keep the conversation away from personal topics, discussing with him scenery, lines, costumes, and prospects

of success, so that, somewhat to his annoyance, he found his intimacy with her no farther advanced than on the evening of their first meeting.

True, one night, apropos of nothing, Gussie, in her rôle of Gladys Ward, did say to him:

"You're married, ain't you?"

Mills turned red as he stammered: "What makes you ask that?"

"All the nice men are," she replied.

He shifted uneasily in his seat, suddenly confronted with a vision of "mother." What would she say, what would she *do*, if she should come upon him sitting here at two o'clock in the morning drinking champagne with a play actress?

"I was married—once," he said lamely.

"Ain't you now?" Gladys persisted.

"If I had a wife, don't you think she'd be here with me on my first trip to New York?" he countered.

Gussie raised her glass flippantly.

"Well, here's to her—wherever she is!"

The toast almost choked Mills, but he drank it, and to his relief Gussie did not pursue the subject further. On subsequent evenings, without his realizing it, she led him on to talk about himself, his mines, the town where he lived, gathering together far more information about him than he had any idea of. About herself, she was always reticent, and she skillfully managed to keep him on strictly formal terms with her. On two or three occasions, as he was putting her in a taxi to send her home, he attempted to kiss her, but she would not permit it.

"Wait," she commanded, "until the first night. If the show's a hit—"

"You will then?" he cried eagerly.

"If you want me to then," she answered, with an odd smile.

And at last the first night came. Trummer and Mills had seats well back in the house, where they could observe

the audience. Charley Max was too nervous to sit down anywhere. He wore out the carpet between the box office and the stage door. On one of his journeys behind the scenes, just as the curtain was about to go up, he found Gussie, all costumed for the first act, with one eye glued to a peephole in the curtain.

"It's a great house we got, yes?" he said, beaming.

"I wasn't counting up," she answered. "I was looking to see if a party I sent front-row-balcony seats to got 'em."

"Did he?"

"The party's there all right," replied the girl, as she scurried away to her dressing room, "and I'll bet you can't guess who it is, either."

The curtain rose. Scattered applause indicated the audience's appreciation of a new stage setting. The opening chorus, the introduction of characters, and the laying of lines for the so-called plot took up the usual eight or ten uninteresting minutes. Entered Gladys Ward, playing *Susie Walton*, with her first song, "I'm Just a Little Country Cousin in This Great Big Town." From that moment on, the play was a big success. Ripples of spontaneous laughter vied with waves of uproarious applause. As the dénouement of the second act was reached, there came a moment of breathless silence, and with the climax burst a roar of laughter that penetrated clear through the closed doors and out into Broadway, and eighteen times the applauding audience called out the smiling Gladys.

Out in the lobby, puffed up with pride, Charley Max exuberantly listened to the plaudits of acquaintances and friends he had never known he had. Dirkin, confidential man for H. & K., who owned the theater and many others, approached and beckoned him to private confab in a corner of the box office.

"You've got something," said Dirkin tersely.

"Sure we got something," said Charley Max proudly.

"H. & K. want half."

"It ain't for sale."

"Fifty thousand—take it or leave it."

"We ain't selling."

"Then you're closing here in three weeks. H. & K. need the theater for one of their own plays."

Charley suddenly awoke to the threatened peril. Unless they let the owners of the theater in on the profits, this theater, and practically every other available theater, would be closed to them. What use was a successful play without a theater to play it in?

"I'll have to see my partners."

"That's better," said Dirkin. "Those terms are liberal, too. We might have declared in for nothing."

"I'll let you know in the morning."

"Right!" said Dirkin, returning to his seat in the theater.

Unable to decide whether it was good or bad news, Charley kept Dirkin's offer to himself until after the third act had come to a close equally as successful as the second's. When the author's speech was over, the star's last bow made, and the curtain had made its final descent, he hastened behind the scenes, where he found Henry Trummer and Joseph Mills congratulating the excited, tired girl on whose pretty shoulders had fallen the burden of the performance. Excitedly he rushed up to the group.

"It's a hit, a big hit we got!" he shouted. "H. & K. already want to buy half of it. Dirkin offers me fifty thousand just a few minutes ago—fifty thousand for half."

"I won't sell," said Trummer firmly.

"Me neither," said Charley.

Together they turned to Joseph Mills, who just then was whispering to Gladys:

"Remember what you promised me the first night, if the show was a hit."

"And Mills," said Trummer, "don't you sell your half neither for fifty thousand. We'll fight them. We've got something. What's fifty thousand to a millionaire?"

"I won't sell," said Mills indifferently, turning again to Gladys.

"You're mistaken, Joseph, I think you will sell," said a quiet voice directly behind him.

Joseph Mills jumped as if he had been torpedoed and turned quickly.

"Why, mother!" he gasped. "How did you get here?"

"Mrs. Smalz sent for me," explained Mrs. Mills placidly, as she beamed at Gussie. "Her and me's been corresponding for some time back. You see, we both have husbands to look out for."

Henry Trummer stood there dazed by the unexpected happening, and Joseph Mills was too confused and frightened and ashamed even to think. But Charley Max quickly recovered his self-possession.

"My dear Mrs. Mills," he said, bustling forward, "we're delighted to have with us to-night the wife of our millionaire backer."

"Millionaire!" sniffed Mrs. Mills incredulously. "Where do you get that stuff? Millionaire—humph!"

"Off the list, we got it. Under investment prospects, it was," explained Charley, surprised for once into telling the truth.

"All the money Joe Mills has in the world, besides the farm," announced his better half, "is twenty-eight thousand dollars he got for his mining claims a couple of months ago."

"And half the fifty thousand he's going to take for his half interest in this piece," said Trummer firmly.

And at this juncture, Mrs. Gussie Smalz, with a roguish look in her wonderful eyes, stepped forward quickly and, with a knowing wink at "mother," kissed the embarrassed Joseph Mills full on the lips with the parting admonition:

"Now run home to mother and be a good little boy."

And he did. Fortunately for the happiness of married couples, romance, delayed in its coming into a man's life until he has arrived at fifty, comes nearly always, not in the guise of tragedy, but, to the eyes of the interested world, as diverting farce-comedy.



A DAY IN THE OPEN

I SAW it born—a blaze and a white splendor—
The Day! I watched it climb through violet bars.
And when it died, I saw the twilight tender
Enshroud it, and for tapers light the stars.

ANTOINETTE DE COURSEY PATTERSON.



More Super-Women

By Anice Terhune

Sophie Arnould:

Queen of Hearts and of Opera.

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword—
But where are the snows of yesteryear?
—*Ballad of Dead Ladies.*

ONE night in Paris, there had been a little supper after the opera. The guest of honor was Mademoiselle Sophie Arnould, idol of the city, beloved of operagoers, protégée of King Louis XV. There were many such suppers, but echoes of this particular *petit souper* reached the ears of the director of police. He called on Mademoiselle Arnould.

She was charmed to receive him.

"You supped at home, madame?" he asked smoothly.

"Very possibly," she replied, as smoothly.

"You had company?"

"I often do," answered Sophie, dropping her eyes demurely.

"Persons of high rank?"

"That happens sometimes, also."

"Who were they?" demanded the officer, a bit truculently.

"I forget," was the simple answer.

"But," burst out the irate officer, "it seems to me that a woman like you would probably remember things of that sort."

"Yes," retorted Sophie with an angelic smile, "but when I am talking with a man like you, I am *not* a woman like me!"

"Sophie Arnould was one of those heroines who, in life, are the scandal of an age and in death its delight," writes her biographer, "lovely, gifted, witty, and utterly disreputable, sharp-tongued and assuredly not fair-souled. The only way to win her heart was to be witty or eccentric."

"I suppose there is a serious side to everything," she once said impatiently, "but it can go hang for all I care! The funny side is the only one that's worth bothering about!"

Most appropriately, Sophie was born on St. Valentine's Day, in 1744. Also quite appropriately, her first name was Magdalen—though, as you will understand presently, she had no use for it.

Her father was a smug merchant, successful in a small way. The family had come from Blois to Paris, and here little Sophie was born. Madame Arnould, the girl's mother, was of the Becky Sharp type. She kept her ears and eyes open and soon established herself as a real Parisienne. She put her bourgeois old husband as much in the background as possible and reared for herself a scaling ladder of friends, up which she climbed until she reached a secure social position. Such spirits as Voltaire, Diderot, and D'Alembert flocked around her.

Brought up in this atmosphere, Sophie began to attract attention almost

from babyhood. She learned to read and write at an incredibly early age, and seemed born with an understanding of music. Ethereally lovely by nature, her beauty was enhanced by her mother's positive genius for dressing her.

One day the gay little creature attracted the attention of the Princess de Conti.

"You darling!" cried the princess at sight of her. Then, turning to Madame Arnould, she said: "Let me have her!"

Madame Arnould was overwhelmed with pride. From that time on, the princess was a sort of fairy godmother to Sophie and took her about constantly.

When the little girl was only ten, the princess heard her singing softly to herself and at once set about having her voice cultivated by the first masters of the time. Then, when Sophie was sixteen, her great chance came. Her patroness was a religious devotee and often went into retreat for a week at a time at her favorite convent. With Sophie, she arrived at the convent unexpectedly, one Mardi Gras, and found the nuns in dire confusion—the star singer was ill.

"My Sophie shall sing!" said the princess.

The abbess was doubtful, but finally consented, as there was no one else to fall back upon. So Sophie's first audience was made up entirely of nuns and religious devotees. The effect of her voice was magical. Every one was enraptured by the beauty and pathos of her singing. This was on Ash Wednesday. Sophie was asked to sing again on Good Friday. Between the two dates the fame of her marvelous voice was spread in all directions. When the time for the Good Friday service came, there was such a crowd that more than two hundred carriages were turned away from the doors.

All of Paris that could get there had come to hear Sophie Arnould sing. All

of Paris left in ecstatic tears. The slip of a girl, then and there, became the idol of the city whose heart is always to be found just beneath its laughing surface.

It was an odd beginning for such a life as hers. But her super-woman star of destiny soon drew her out of calm waters. News of "the angel with the celestial voice" reached the court. The queen, Marie Leczinska, sent for her. Sophie sang. The timid, gentle queen was enchanted. Turning to the ever-present Princess de Conti, she said:

"Let me have her, cousin!"

The "other Queen of France," Madame de Pompadour, heard of it, and instantly decided that Sophie must be added to her own bag of tricks. A battle royal ensued. The Princess de Conti was in despair, afraid to offend the queen, more afraid to offend the all-powerful favorite.

Finally the Pompadour won—as was to be expected. Again Sophie was sent for, this time to the Pompadour's apartments. Accompanied by her mother, she reached the salon only to be told that she must wait, as the favorite had not yet returned to her rooms.

Nothing loath, Sophie sat down at the piano and poured forth her glorious voice to her heart's content. Suddenly her ear was softly pinched. Madame de Pompadour stood at her elbow.

"My dear child," she said, "you were born for the stage. You are certainly not nervous!"

Sophie jumped to her feet; then curtseyed in pretty confusion, apologizing for having appropriated the piano.

"You will make a lovely princess," was the Pompadour's cryptic answer.

Then she had a good impulse. Turning to Madame Arnould, she said:

"If the queen should happen to want your daughter for the palace, do not have the folly to consent. Instead of giving this child—innocent as she is—

to the queen, you will have made a present to the king."

The next day Sophie was told that Queen Marie had appointed her to be "of her private music." Madame Arnould was in a flutter of delight.

As the Pompadour had predicted, however, the king, Louis XV., was present at her royal débüt. Sophie looked radiantly beautiful. "Her cheeks, flaming with excitement, set off her soft black hair and glorious, large gray eyes to perfection."

"Her eyebrows," says a contemporary chronicler, "were sweeping, like the wings of a flying bird. Her face was oval, and conveyed an expression of tender sorrow. She was not tall, but slender and graceful."

Her mouth, too, was lovely, though her teeth were shockingly bad. Dentistry was still in its infancy. However, a trifle like that never bothered King Louis' susceptible heart. He fell in love with her, without any unnecessary delay.

A day or two later came a *lettre de cachet* from the king, appointing her to his "private music, particularly the Royal Opera."

Madame Arnould burst into tears. She rushed to various friends, seeking sanctuary for Sophie. None dared to offend the king by hiding her. The Princess de Conti was equally perturbed, and tried to find a safe retreat for her protégée, but with no result.

"In the days of the old Bourbon monarchy, a girl once inscribed on the books of the opera was released from all control of her parents," says Sutherland Edwards. "Many girls were victimized by *lettres de cachet* ordering them to join the opera."

The "victimizing" of Sophie, except, perhaps, so far as the enamored king was concerned, was delayed for an unusually long time.

"Going to the devil is my destiny," said Sophie, with a hard laugh. "But

I am certain that Beelzebub will be courteous enough to meet me halfway!"

Her mother guarded her, right jealously, night and day. The grimly formidable old lady was at Sophie's side every minute the girl was out of her own house.

This "own house" of the Arnoulds, by the way, was not particularly attractive to any one just at that time, by reason of the fact that Monsieur Arnould had turned its upper floors into lodgings for students and other unattached men of low position and shallow purses.

The same love that laughs at locksmiths probably lavishes just as cynical a guffaw upon parents—and for the same reason; at least such a laugh was surely due in Sophie's case. Her mother's guardianship proved useless. Here is the story:

One of the old Arnoulds' least profitable lodgers was a gawkily shy youth just from the country—Dorval by name. He was afraid of Paris; he was afraid of life; above all, he was afraid of women. He clung almost in terror to the protection of Papa and Mamma Arnould. Sophie he shunned as if she had been a sorceress. His avoidance of her was laughable.

One morning the Arnoulds awoke to find Dorval gone. Sophie was gone, too. Presently a liveried lackey called with a letter, which he delivered to the frantic parents.

The letter was on coroneted paper and was accompanied by a fat sheaf of Bank of France notes. The brief epistle read:

DEAR MONSIEUR AND MADAME: I have taken the liberty of borrowing your charming daughter. Indeed, I confess I became an inmate of your hospitable home for that same sweet purpose.

I inclose a small gift, to compensate you for your loss. As further consolation, I promise, most gladly, to marry mademoiselle as soon as my present wife does me the honor to die.

With deepest respect to my brevet parents-in-law,

LOUIS DE BRANCAS, DUC DE LAURAGUAIS.
(*soi-disant* DORVAL.)

De Lauraguais was probably the most eccentric man in Paris. Enormously rich, he was a choice blend of genius and crank and professional gallant. Although he had stolen Sophie in this summary fashion, he loved her with far more than passing devotion. Indeed, he loved her to the day of his death. And he, in turn, was the one great passion of Sophie's life.

The couple quarreled with maniac fury a million times, but always their quarrels were patched up, sooner or later, by their mutual love.

Madame Arnould wept a little at her daughter's defection. Papa Arnould swore much. Then, as the rank and wealth of the suitor sank into their minds, they decided to take their loss philosophically. Theirs, after all, was no unique experience among the bourgeoisie of Bourbon France.

Madame Arnould even went to call upon her happily erring daughter. She found Sophie established in a delightful little house. All the appointments were perfect. But, to the loving mother's eye, something seemed lacking—Sophie was not loaded down with jewels, as became her new rôle.

"Is it possible, dear, that he has given you no diamonds?" the mother demanded, with quick parental solicitude.

"Why, no," laughed Sophie. "A little bourgeoisie ought not to adorn herself like her betters."

"Then I suppose," hinted Madame Arnould, still hopefully, "he makes it up to you in the size of your allowance."

"Allowance?" echoed Sophie. "I have no right to one. Monsieur de Lauraguais has a wife and children and a position to maintain. I have no right to draw on a fortune that belongs to others."

"Oh, my dear!" wailed the heart-broken mother. "Why don't you leave him, then?"

"Because I love him and he loves me," retorted Sophie, unimpressed by this appeal to her higher morality. "We were imprudent perhaps. That is our affair. He has given me two million kisses and made me shed four million tears. I am content."

Sophie was probably trying to discourage her mother's cupidity by making this grand-stand play, for there were presents, and many of them, during the six stormy years that Sophie and De Lauraguais were together.

At last there came a quarrel in which Sophie chased the duke out of the house with a riding whip. This done, she packed all his presents, including their two children, into a carriage and sent them to Madame de Lauraguais—his wife. The duchess was equal to the occasion. She sent back the carriage and the presents with scorn, but kept the children.

Sophie took to her bed and called a doctor—a "graduate in homicide," she dubbed him. The physician was going hunting and had a gun under his arm as he came into the room. Sophie glanced at the gun, and her gray eyes twinkled.

"Ah! I see you are afraid of missing me the *other* way!" she cried.

She was famous for her wit. Once when the poet, Benard—one of her adorers—called, she found him lying under a tree in her garden.

"What are you doing?" she asked amusedly.

"Talking to myself," replied Benard.

"Take care, then," said Sophie. "You are talking to a base flatterer."

Another time, she was discussing the dancing of Madame Guinard, who was unimaginably thin.

"When I see her tripping the *pas de trois* with two men, it reminds me of

two dogs fighting over a bone," she said.

Her bon mots were picked up and quoted everywhere. Her beauty, her tremendous success at the opera, made her the most talked-of woman of her time in Paris.

One love affair jostled close on the heels of another.

De Lauraguais came tumbling back to her with frantic speed, only to find himself already supplanted by Monsieur Bertin—wealthy, easy-going, good-tempered, and practical.

The duke tried pleading, threats, anger, promises, remorse in turn. All were in vain. Sophie positively refused to have anything more to do with him, and threw herself into the affair with Bertin for all she was worth. I strongly suspect that she still loved De Lauraguais, for though Monsieur Bertin loaded her with diamonds and other gifts, paid her enormous debts, provided a dowry for her sister, and had the finest coach in Paris built for her, she soon grew restless and decided that he was dull—a fault she always found insupportable. She told him so, with scant ceremony. He tried to propitiate his goddess by a Christmas gift of twelve thousand livres. She threw him over at once—first taking the twelve thousand livres.

Paris gossiped madly, accusing Sophie and De Lauraguais of cooking up the whole affair as a speculation. This scandal De Lauraguais silenced forever by promptly refunding to Bertin every cent of the one hundred thousand livres he had spent on Sophie.

By this time Sophie's lovers, headed by the Prince de Conti, were legion, but her old fondness for De Lauraguais reasserted itself, and he was reinstated. Their second venture was more stormy than the first. The duke was more jealous than ever—doubtless with reason.

Every day there were angry accusa-

tions, indignant denials, bitter reproaches, apologies, and reconciliation. The lovers were always separating and coming together again. They were miserable together and wretchedly unhappy apart. Whenever misfortune attacked either of them, all grievances were at once forgotten.

Finally De Lauraguais read a paper before the Académie des Sciences attacking the advocate general, Joly de Fleury. The latter went to the king and demanded the duke's arrest. The request was only too quickly granted, as the duke had lately horrified the court by writing a scurrilous lampoon on Louis. De Lauraguais was consigned to the fortress of Metz "during his majesty's pleasure."

Sophie moved heaven and earth to save him. She closed her salon and put on mourning. The king refused to listen to her pleas. Finally Sophie appeared at Fontainebleau in the opera of "Dardanus." She surpassed herself. The pathos of her wonderful voice melted even the blasé Louis. Seizing her opportunity, she dragged the minister of marine, De Choiseul, aside, threw herself at his feet, and begged for her lover's release. The old minister, immensely flattered, lost his heart and head and promised. He kept his word.

Sophie and De Lauraguais once more rushed into each other's arms.

All that the poor old minister of marine got out of it was one of Sophie's bon mots at his expense. Full of hope, he appeared at the star's dressing room at the opera. The scene on the stage represented a ship in a storm.

"Oh, how fortunate that you are here!" pertly exclaimed Sophie. "I suppose you came to try to learn something about the navy."

Nobody was safe from her tongue.

One bitterly cold winter night she met the greedy, unscrupulous Torri, the detested comptroller of France.

Her sharp eyes noted that his hands were warmly hidden in a muff.

"What need has he of a muff?" she sniffed scornfully. "Are not his hands always in our pockets?"

Sophie was now at the apex of her success. Thursday, her day for appearing, became the most brilliant at the opera, quite eclipsing Friday, the official gala performance of the week. Entertainments were forever being given in her honor.

At one late supper, the intriguing and abominably wicked old Duc de Vaugouss suddenly died. The next night, at the opera, during the ballet of demons in "Castor et Pollux," everything went wrong.

"What's the matter with them all?" growled the *maitre de ballet* in the wings.

"The devils have been so upset by the Duc de Vaugouss' sudden appearance among them," whispered Sophie in his ear, "that their heads are turned."

Let me give just one more quotation from Sophie—after which I promise to go on with the story. One of her friends, a young singer named Mademoiselle Laguerre, was so beloved by the Duc de Bouillon that he spent eight hundred thousand livres on her in the course of three months.

A friend asked of Sophie:

"How is Mademoiselle Laguerre nowadays?"

"I don't know at present," was the reply, "but for the last month, the poor child has been living entirely on Bouillon!"

Of the same singer—who created the principal rôle in "Iphigenia in Tauris," and who one night showed unmistakable signs of having dined too well—Sophie said:

"*Mon Dieu!* This is not 'Iphigenia in Tauris'; it is 'Iphigenia in Champagne!'"

Meantime, Sophie was a storm center, both at home and at the opera.

During a particularly violent quarrel with De Lauraguais, she deserted him for Prince Henin.

About this time Gluck, the composer—young, ardent, and romantic—fell deeply in love with her. She created the part of *Zeloire*, in his "Castor et Pollux," the rôle in which Garrick called her the greatest emotional actress and singer of her time.

It was well for Sophie that Gluck and his operas came on the scene when they did, for her star showed signs of waning. She drove the directors of the opera almost insane with her whims and caprices. She had as little regard for the obligations of a professional contract and her duty to the public as she had for her virtue. She knew that she was necessary, and she abused her position. She sang or not, as she wished. One night at the opera, she was announced to appear, and did so—in a box above the stage.

"Why are you up here, madame?" fumed the director. "You are supposed to be ill."

"I thought it a splendid chance to study my understudy," was all the satisfaction he got.

Yet, when she liked a part, her singing and acting were so superior to every rival's that all else was forgiven and forgotten.

But to return to Gluck. He and Prince Henin were bitter enemies. They met constantly at Sophie's, and detested each other.

One evening, while Sophie was entertaining Gluck, the prince was announced. Gluck did not get up, but went right on talking and ignored the presence of the prince.

"Sir," said the latter, with frigid hauteur, "it is usual, I believe, in France, to rise when some one enters a room—especially if the visitor be a person of distinction."

"It is the custom in my country,"

retorted Gluck, "to rise only for those whom one esteems."

Sophie uttered a pretty protest at Gluck's affront to the prince. Gluck, his heart aflame, jumped to his feet.

"Madame," he cried, "since I perceive that you are not mistress in your house, I leave you and will never enter it again!" and he never did.

Foreign ambassadors covered Sophie with diamonds; serene highnesses threw themselves at her feet; dukes and peers sent her carriages. Sophie jested at the depraved life she was leading. She laughed at public comment.

Prince Henin now proposed to build her a house. François Joseph Belanger, thirty, handsome, and, above all, witty, was chosen as architect. The house never got beyond the "paper" stage, for Sophie fell in love with the architect, and he with her. She loved him dearly—for a time. Rumor said that they were to marry. As a matter of fact, he did beg her to marry him. She would not hear of it, but she never could resist the chance for an epigram.

"What would you have?" she asked laughingly. "So many people are trying to tear down my reputation, I need some one to build it up. Could I do better than choose an architect?"

This affair lasted the better part of five years. Of course there were quarrels. But, like De Lauraguais, Belanger always came back, and, again like the duke, he loved her as long as he lived.

In the background was Prince Henin, but he bored Sophie—she confessed it herself—and she endured him only because he had become a habit.

De Lauraguais resolved to "kill" the prince. He called a consultation of eminent doctors and asked them if a person could die of boredom. The doctors, thinking it a family affair, politely said, "Yes," and solemnly signed a paper to that effect. Armed with this paper, the determined lover went to the police and lodged a complaint against

Henin for endangering the life of the actress, Sophie Arnould. All Paris laughed. No one more than Sophie. Henin called De Lauraguais out. The duel was a fizzle. The duke, after a longer interval than usual, was reinstated in Sophie's heart.

She was changed, however. Her break with Gluck was one of the greatest mistakes in her life, for Gluck was the coming man, musically, and the principal part in his next opera was given to Sophie's rival, Rosalie Levasseur.

Rosalie's voice was harsh and coarse. Sophie remarked bitterly:

"She ought certainly to have the part. She has the voice of the people."

Sophie's friends threatened to mob the opera house. There was war between the Gluck and the anti-Gluck factions. The case of Arnould versus Levasseur was the talk of the whole town, the topic in every newspaper.

Sophie's friends were powerful. Matters trembled in the balance. Then the prima donna made a bad break. She was singing one night, when she discovered the Comte d'Artois—later Charles X.—ogling her from a box. She responded with the sort of wink she might have given Belanger. Charles scowled. The audience hissed. She had committed social and musical suicide. Amid a storm of catcalls, she disappeared.

Her day was done. She had always been open-handed and generous to a fault, and her long list of pensioners—mostly old actors and actresses—had left her penniless. Henin deserted her at once, as did many of her followers. Not so her sense of humor. She kept that always, as is evinced by her remark at her daughter's wedding. Glancing around the room, filled with the smug, respectable, provincial relatives of the bridegroom, she said with innocent pride:

"Odd, is it not, that the mother of

the bride should be the only unmarried woman here?"

Now came the troublous days of the Revolution. Sophie was a suspect, on account of her former intimacy with the aristocracy.

The revolutionary committee called. Sophie received them with a smiling face, but a quaking heart.

"I have always been a very active patriot," she said. "I know the 'Rights of Man' by heart, and I have sung twenty years at the Opéra Nationale for the pleasure of the sovereign people."

The committee, unsatisfied, insisted on searching the house. Presently they discovered a bust of Gluck, and stopped to look at it.

"It is Marat!" said Sophie, in a tone of deepest veneration.

The sans-culottes uncovered and tiptoed out apologetically.

In her poverty and desolation, her two dearest friends did not forget her. Belanger, imprisoned, released, impoverished, sent her two louis which he had scraped together, begging her to

accept them for old time's sake. She wrote him a tender letter of affection and gratitude, but, though starving, she returned the money, knowing that he must need it. Poor, broken De Lauraguais did what little he could to help her.

Belanger wrote this vehement letter to Lucien Bonaparte, minister of interior, trying to secure a pension for Sophie:

Mademoiselle Arnould, now so utterly forsaken, was once surrounded by men of learning. She lived to help the unfortunate and poor. She lived to leave models and pupils to the stage which she adorned and even created. Eminent men have immortalized her talents and her wit, and yet this woman is dying for want of means to procure remedies for the cruel sufferings which she endures!

Dying, she cried out:

"Farewell, remembrance! Oh, the beautiful days!" Then she whispered, "*Quia multum amavit!*"

Her death occurred in 1803.

She lies in an unknown grave, her poor funeral paid for by the faithful Belanger and De Lauraguais.

Next Month: Peggy Shippen.





The Cake Shop

By Jeannette Derby

Author of "Fishing," "An Instrument of Light," etc.

IT was time for the cake shop to close. The proprietor sat at a marble-topped table and considered accounts. He had a sad face and a coat with a rolling collar of Eastern mink. How could one wear sadness in a shop full of happy little cakes? Did you see the chocolate ones that puffed each a hazelnut from the goodness of its heart? And the silver-white ovals with a curly sweet pea fashioned atop—as fine a flower as the most gracious summer could devise, and finer, because this you could eat and remember long afterward with bliss.

Such cakes had never before been seen outside of Holland or Belgium. They had been composed by a poet of pastry and arranged by an artist in colors and a lover of flowers and sweets. There was greater demand for them than there were cakes to supply, for no branch shops along Broadway flourished sister cakes arranged in the same artful way. That this one place was successful, witness the rolling collar of Eastern mink.

When the warm days came, the shop was a kaleidoscope of young girls in pretty frocks going from case to case, plate in hand, choosing the cakes they wanted to eat with their ice cream—French ice cream, in crystal dishes that might have come from Jack Frost's pottery. Then the shop was like a garden—buds of girls, flowers of cakes, buzz like bees, and bird voices. There were plenty of young men, too, from the uni-

versity near, with an even greater capacity for sweets. For you must know that, no matter what flower they resembled or what color they were, or fragrance; every cake tasted like a bit of blue heaven sprinkled with star dust and was served on a cloud—a frilled cloud of lace paper.

The sad face of Otto Tortmann was, in a sense, not in keeping with the cakes. Yet it was not jarring. Rather, it lent distinction, gave that note of contrast necessary for all happy effects. But it was not for art that he had the sadness.

Fifty years ago, Otto Tortmann had been born in Holland, just outside of Rotterdam, down Dordrecht way. The art of making cakes had been born in him, for his father had had a cake shop and his grandfather had been a court baker. Otto studied designing in Antwerp, and pastry art in Paris. Then, with such technique, such mastery of his trade, what should enter the boy's head and the heads of his relatives and friends but America—America, the land of quick gold.

He was only twenty, but already he had Meenja, Meenja with a face like a forget-me-not and a heart as modest and sweet. They were planning to marry in June, for Otto would not hear of leaving a flower maid like Meenja free. Then he was to sail to America, prepare a little home, and send for his bride soon—very soon.

Five days more and they were to have been married. That afternoon

sang and hummed and chanted. Every doorway and ledge rioted with thrifty blossoms. The still canal bloomed with their reflections. Windows toward the west blazed like eyes of fire with the setting sun. Tourists were about, exclaiming, chattering, staring, using their kodaks like birds of prey pouncing on shadows. Otto tried to understand their English—he was studying so hard—but they talked like magpies. He thought proudly, "Ah, soon I shall have your English, and Meenja shall have it, too."

His heart was bursting with happy thoughts, and his mind was full of ambitious plans as he walked, when he was startled by a stampede of women and children running clickety-clack in their wooden shoes over the cobbles. All were excited. All clumped to the dike. He stopped a child to ask what had happened.

"Boy drowned," the child said, and ran clickety-clack all the faster to catch up with his companions.

Still people kept coming, more women, now, and men—and children! Surely all the children of Holland were afoot. What unearthly racket they made with their wooden shoes! Down all these years it has been in Otto Tortmann's ears—the sound of wooden shoes, click-clacking down the cobbled street to the water.

A couple of English girls asked him in bewildered German what had happened. He held up his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and then, to his own surprise and theirs, answered in English: "Boy drowned."

He felt great pity that such sorrow had to be when he was so happy. He walked down to the water till he saw a close-knit crowd and women with aprons over their faces. Then the crowd parted, and two rough boatmen came into view carrying something heavy, something muffled from sight. The people fell into a sad procession

behind them. A woman with a child by the hand kept close to the men. She was sobbing and praying. Father in heaven, it was Meenja!

One bound and Otto was with her. And it was Ansel, the sturdy brother of Meenja, who was drowned—Ansel, the only boy. Now only Meenja and the little sister, seven-year-old Lotta, were left.

Those were hard days. Meenja was broken-hearted. She could not marry in such sadness. It would bring bad luck to all their married days. Otto was distracted. His ticket was bought. It had cost so much money. He must go. He must make their fortune, his and Meenja's. Oh, it was dreadful that such sorrows could come like demon rockets from so blue a sky!

Otto sailed for America, a heavy-hearted boy, and Meenja wept for days, yes, months. For Otto, there was much to contend with—a new language, strange ways. He was homesick and heartsick. But a man must fight and win. He must make a home for Meenja, make her happy—make her forget all these hard times.

Gold came not so quickly. He must work very hard at most prosaic baking. His dream cakes that were molded like flowers, they must sleep while he worked for six dollars a week "to learn the ropes." He had patience and health, and was not he working for Meenja?

He tried to make his letters sound cheery and prosperous, but he had not yet learned to "bluff" American fashion, and Meenja, like a loving woman, read between the lines.

After many months, Otto was earning nine dollars a week. Then he made a special rusk that sold before it got cold. That put him into favor, and he knew that it would not be long before he was earning twelve dollars. Then Meenja could come! He grew buoyant.

Then he received a letter saying that Meenja had a fever, and before he

could realize it, another letter came saying that Meenja was dead.

So came the sad face to the proprietor of the cake shop, the shop that was famous through the upper West Side.

Otto Tortmann's love was dead. He had her picture, taken in the gala cap with stiff-starched lace. The picture was faded now, but Otto had never had another love, had had no thought of one. Meenja had been his, and she was gone. Not many men reason that way—so long.

There was something else that Otto Tortmann wanted—something that he ached for. He dreaded, yet longed, for the summers, for then his shop was full of girls—so many pretty, happy, sweet daughters. He imagined their homes full of laughter, of kindness and joy, and pictured their proud, indulgent fathers. He would go to his lonely rooms and talk to the faded picture and sigh, "Ah, Meenja, we would have had a big girl by this time." But no daughter was to be had without Meenja.

The little cakes won all hearts, and the shop grew famous, but the proprietor lived more and more to himself with his pipes and his books of design. Yet he thought more and more about a daughter, knowing all the time that he was foolish and that a daughter was impossible for him—since Meenja was dead.

It was time for the cake shop to close. On a side street some boys were drilling, and it was the click-clack of their muskets probably that had recalled the sound of wooden shoes on old Holland cobbles. Otto Tortmann put his accounts into the safe, reminded a white-capped clerk of a special order to go out early in the morning, then turned curiously.

"Any more policemen to-day, George, asking what was a Dutchman if he wasn't German?"

"Only the same one who watches us all the time. He said to me, 'Well, Dutchy, how much money you taken in for old Bill to-day?' meaning the kaiser. Awkward being Dutch, sir. Going to spoil trade."

Click-clack-clickety-click sounded the boys, and Otto Tortmann looked troubled as he buttoned his coat, with its rolling collar of Eastern mink, and went out.

It was a beautiful January night. Broadway was agleam and awinkle. Many taxis and automobiles made wheelings and whirrings. The surface cars whizzed with a joyous celerity. Otto Tortmann walked over to the river that flowed still and peaceful through a different world, a world of space and stars. He walked far up the Drive—and suddenly he was filled with a warm glow and a great peace. He wondered where it came from, the feeling that filled him. It could have nothing to do with business—and what else had Otto Tortmann?

As he entered his silent rooms, that strange glow and content entered with him—and there lay a letter from Holland. Holland letters were now years apart, and his heart beat. And you could never guess it was from the little Lotta! Little! Indeed she was married to one of a strange name, and her youngest child—youngest, remember—was nearly fourteen. Lotta wrote:

She is a child of strange, strong notions. When she was a tot, she heard the story of her Aunt Meenja and the betrothed in America. Ever since, Mynheer Otto Tortmann has been her chief thought. It is surely strange, but she talks of you as if she had known you, pictures you as if from memory. It is uncanny. I had to promise to write this letter to you, but, oh, sir, if you are at this address, and really all that the child builds you to be of goodness—oh, my heart will break because we cannot keep her!

She would only run away if we tried. For she has the cleverest head and the most ingenious of any of the children.

Adventures have seemed always to fall to

her—from the time she was seven and we took her over to France one time when her father had business to make there. A French soldier saved his horse from crushing her by catching her up to him. Then she did not want to get down, and he asked our permission and took her around the town on his horse. Dijon was the place. Then the French gentleman borrowed her for three days, and he and his wife made much of her and visited her here the next summer. How she studied French for him! How she was always his "*Petit Chou*" until this war swallowed him! He was a soldier with high rank in his country. Such things always happen to Juletta, and this French soldier told her she must be always fearless and friendly. And now it is America in her head.

If this reaches you, will you write me what chances there are in America for a girl like mine? And if it is fate that she must go, will you promise to keep in touch with her until she is grown and making her way well?

The letter rambled on for pages, pages from a mother's heart of love, pride, and sorrow—details of their means, the amount that could be spared for the child's journey and for emergencies. Otto Tortmann pored over its story and had wonderful stirrings—yet he would not allow himself to build too gorgeously. All might be mirage or worse.

He thought over that letter with an energy of smoking until dawn, and his answer to it was a credit to his business training. He wrote that his business had been picking up before the war—he had made nearly one hundred thousand dollars—that he lived alone and had perhaps grown queer, but that if the little girl was a good and studious lass and manageable, there would be many things open to her here for a good livelihood. His landlady would house her under his care, while Juletta and America were getting acquainted. He would meet her, and he advised the safest line, the class, cautioned against much luggage, and signed his letter to the sister of Meenja, dead thirty years, "Your brother, Otto Tortmann."

It was several weeks before an an-

swer came to his letter. Juletta would sail on the twenty-sixth of March, and arrive in New York April 5th—and it was March 28th when he received the letter.

Otto Tortmann was nervous and excited. He made a serious business with his landlady about window boxes of scarlet geraniums and new curtains for his sitting room, as if they were bonds for life investment. But he would not hear of Juletta's room being fussed or frilled; he would have only the plainest, neatest furniture, the primmest curtains, a shining floor with but one rug before the little bed.

The day before Juletta's steamer was due, there was a gala cake baked. Outside, it was white, beaded with silver. On top was a perfect flag of the Netherlands, done in satiny, raised icing. The inside was bliss.

Land of time, how the hours dragged! The swell of Otto Tortmann's heart as the steamer was at last sighted! How she c-r-a-w-l-e-d into dock, and what a mass of people hung over the rails! A high, quavering voice sounded: "Mynheer Onkel! Mynheer Onkel Otto!"

He saw her! Many people saw her. Evidently she was a center of interest—and no wonder. She was a bit of Holland intact, and nothing hurt by fashions. Her skirts ballooned with—the mother in Holland alone knew how many petticoats. Her hair, in shining braids, was wound tight to her neat little head. Her round Dutch face was pale with excitement. Only her ears were coral-colored, and the forget-me-not eyes were fine and well placed. The childish mouth was set firmly with womanly responsibility. And when Otto Tortmann waved to her solemnly, his eyes shining, she pressed two thankful hands painfully together. But had she not known, had she not said all the time, he would be like that—kind and sad?

When she was at last passed down the gangplank and Otto Tortmann was there with both his hands out, "Spik Angleesh!" she cried proudly. But he, though he smiled, could speak no word of any language. Tears were running down his cheeks. His mouth worked. All the thirty years of loneliness heaved in him, the old hurts bled, at this onrush of Holland, at this fresh, sweet Dutch girl who might have been the Meenja of long ago.

Juletta showed womanly understanding. She spoke softly in her own tongue:

"It is the old country I remind you of, Mynheer Onkel, I know it." Then, shyly joking, "If you tell me which language you are crying in, I can help you."

Otto Tortmann shook the tears away, blew his nose very hard—and stooped and kissed her. Then he said, picking his way carefully in the long-unused Dutch:

"My young lady niece, those tears were in both languages. But they couldn't have been happier tears if I had used every language in the world to weep in, for I am so glad to have a little kinswoman come to live with me."

They both smiled and understood each other perfectly.

Then they went with an inspector to find her trunk. It was a willow trunk and it, too, had a petticoat over its cover.

"That is a beautiful frock you have on," she said appraisingly, referring to his overcoat, "but it is dusty under the buttons."

They went uptown in a cab. A porter put the petticoated trunk above, and Otto Tortmann gave him something from a handful of loose change and was about to slop the rest into his overcoat pocket when her hand stayed him.

"Put that in your inside pocket," she said. And Otto Tortmann put it in his

inside pocket and was happy clear through.

The cake shop was perhaps the greatest of the many wonders that burst upon Juletta now. She called it the "Court Cake Shop," for she could not believe that such a beautiful place could exist except for royalty. It quite awed her, and what it must cost to maintain put her beyond the ability to compute. But her uncle reassured her. He said every country had its ways. In Holland, for instance, one could not have a shop like this until one was well set up in business. In America, one must have a beautiful shop in order to get set up. That was a problem for Juletta.

She was given responsibility for the rooms, the flowers, her uncle.

"A heart develops on responsibility," he said sagely to Mrs. Peterson, the landlady.

But Juletta burned with zeal to help "the business."

"Can I, a great girl—and with such an appetite!—can I take my food and my home—and do nothing? All the expense of me comes out of the business, Mrs. Peterson. I must help!"

She prevailed on Mrs. Peterson to maneuver that all the shop's dainty linen should be smuggled to her for her care. She laundered exquisitely, mended religiously and secretly, and put away every bit of silver that came as pay for the work—put it away in an old tobacco pouch. The pouch swelled and swelled; its contents changed from silver to bills and from small bills to big bills. Uncle and niece deceived each other, and Mrs. Peterson helped them both. It was a game in which no player knew the stakes. For Otto Tortmann played to make a fine woman of his niece, and Juletta, she played for the "business."

In spite of all that good will and happiness, another player came into the

pretty game—grim war, pointing a finger at any name that was like a German name. And young people, often cruel and ruthless in their zeal, marked the modest "O. Tortmann" in the corner of the window and, "No more German cakes for us," they said.

Of course there were a few of fair mind who made inquiries into O. Tortmann's nationality, who knew that Holland was not Prussia and who discovered further that the proprietor of the cake shop was an American citizen of thirty years' standing. And there were a few gourmets—bless them!—who might have gone to unpatriotic lengths rather than give up certain cakes and pastry. But, in general, the one-time crowd of patrons were chorus for the policeman's "Aw, what's a Dutchman if he ain't German?" And the cake shop was in a fair way to fail.

It was long before Juletta sensed that trouble, so much that was new assailed her mind on every side. A year's schooling had made her English well-nigh perfect, and to Otto Tortmann, she was the sunrise and the young moon, she was a field of tulips and the very salt of his existence.

When a nobby tobacco pouch was presented to him, solemnly, "for the business," he required much explanation, and his amazement grew—husky. For, you see, the nobbiness in that pouch amounted to sixty-one dollars. He came very near making a fool of himself, but finally he grew solemn outside, though inside he was hot and cold and tender. He told her that before the war that amount would have trebled itself in a month, but now the cake shop was costing him much money, and nobody could tell what might be before him and—the business.

Handling the nobby old pouch, he told her of the years he had longed for a daughter. He told her how her coming had been like a miraculous granting of his desire, and how his prospects

had been so bright that it had seemed a good thing for her to be with him. But now—it was hard to believe—but a business like his, once started downhill, might push him into potter's field—and—he must not hold her—from brighter prospects—a better investment for this sixty-one dollars. And yet maybe—and he grew more solemn outside and more tremulous inside—maybe she might still elect to cast her lot with him— He did not look at her.

Juletta gasped, "Why, uncle!" Then, suddenly understanding, she threw her strong young arms about him and laughed, though the forget-me-not eyes were dewy. "My uncle! My uncle! Did you think the niece of Aunt Meenja would ever leave you? You are my uncle, my father, and my home!"

She hugged him like an ecstatic bear and said that the more the cake shop ran downhill, the more he needed her.

Juletta took the business deeply to heart and haunted the shop in hopes of a saving idea. She wept one afternoon when such a pretty girl said to the group with her, and so loudly that every one within the shop had to hear, "No German cakes for us, girls!" And Juletta, losing her usual shyness and exhibiting more temperament than is usually credited to Dutch blood, said just as openly, though her chin trembled, "Even if we were German, would it be fair?" And a gray-haired artist, sitting comprehendingly before a plate of cakes, said, "Keep a stiff upper lip, dear child. These cakes will win your war!"

Then came an interesting week, when Broadway and Amsterdam and the streets all about the university were decorated gorgeously—fences covered with blue bunting and hung with green wreaths about enlistment posters. There was to be a ceremony—a conferring of degrees on famous representatives of our foreign Allies. The French cock and the English lion lorded it over the

shop's window, and when the afternoon came, Broadway was black with people and automobiles moving slowly toward the university. How the wind blew! But the shop stood open—festive, firm, and alert. Yes, the shop's specially begrudging policeman was there, reënforced by others, all resplendent and important.

Julette had forgotten business and war's finger in her child's pleasure in the crowds and her thrill as the great throng surged forward and boys belieded, "Here they come!" and such beflagged automobiles came through!

And then the policeman had to stop every one, the whole procession, for a very high hat had blown from the very honorable head of a very great dignitary, and—well, it's hard to tell just how it happened, it was so quick and startling. Julette had shot through the people and between the carriages and right up to the most guarded automobile, crying:

"Thou hast not forgotten! Thou hast not forgotten Julette! Père Jacques! Père Jacques! Oh-h!"

And to the everlasting astonishment of one policeman in especial, the great Joffre swept the little Dutch girl from the car step into his arms and planted delighted kisses on each of her glowing

cheeks! And as the same policeman afterward declared, "Why, they jabbered quick frog talk—those two—so you'd know there was no Dutch feeling there!" And Julette was escorted proudly back to the shop and her blinking uncle as the automobiles started. Thousands knew in a few minutes that the cake shop held a little friend of the great Marshal Joffre.

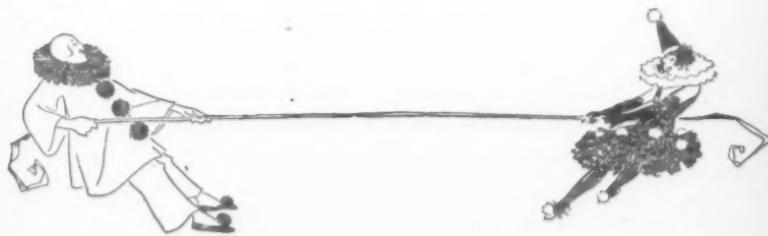
George does not need to show you where the great man sat in the cake shop, a few hours after the ceremony at Columbia—no, nor the kind of cakes he ate—because everybody knows. George has had to have two helpers since that time, and Julette has said every day since:

"To think, when the papers were full of Joffre, I never knew it was my Père Jacques!"

She has taught George a few French sentences, and whenever their special policeman is near enough, she smiles and signs, "Frog talk now, George!"

But you couldn't impress that policeman more than he has been impressed!

Isn't it time for the cake shop to close? When the war is over—and God grant that may be soon!—the proprietor and his niece plan a visit to Holland, just outside of Rotterdam down Dordrecht way.





“Her Feet Beneath Her Petticoat”—

By F. E. Bailey

IV.—The Best People

LAURELTINE sat entertaining Sir Walter Giffard in the drawing-room of her mother's cottage. She had the most beautiful legs in the world, due, alas, for untimely extinction, since her years numbered almost sixteen. At present, rose silk stockings, to match a hand-painted evening frock, veiled charms entirely wasted on Sir Walter Giffard. Laureltine's perfect face, with its broad, low brow, firm chin, and straight little nose above an adorable mouth, wore an expression of polite boredom. Her violet eyes concealed unfathomable thoughts.

Laureltine's mother, secluded in her own tiny sitting room, felt the serene consciousness of one who has left the young people together, mingled with a faint pity for Sir Walter Giffard, who, twenty, very correct, a sort of half cousin, understood it was understood that in due time he should marry Laureltine.

“Your father's regiment's doing pretty well at the front,” observed Sir Walter approvingly. “Quite a good regiment, too. Not exactly in the same street with ours, but a good regiment.”

“Let me see—yours is the Royal Standbacks, isn't it?” queried Laureltine vaguely.

“Cornish Guards. We're the only crush allowed to drink the king's health in Benedictine. Most people drink it in port.”

“Yes?”

“There's only one tailor in London

can make our uniform correctly. His firm has done it for two hundred years. Even a service jacket costs ten guineas.”

“How very interesting!”

Sir Walter glanced at his clandestine evening dress, quite contrary to regulations, distastefully.

“Do you know many girls, Walter?” asked Laureltine suddenly.

“A good few. All the best people call on the mess.”

“I hate the best people. I like interesting ones. Men are never very interesting till they're thirty and give up talking about themselves. That's why I adore Robbie. You met him this morning, you remember. He always talks about me, and calls me princess, and flirts adorably. You can't flirt a bit, Walter. You're too absorbed in yourself. Morbid, I call it.”

Sir Walter reddened a little.

“I don't think the—ah—person in question is a very desirable friend for you, Laureltine. He looks seedy and disreputable—not one of us, in fact. What is he?”

“His name's Henry Robson, and he lives by himself in the dearest little cottage. He never troubles about people. I love him,” confessed Laureltine simply.

“Some day,” explained Walter, struggling for calm, “you'll see things in their proper light. A girl who's pretty and a lady can't be too careful.”

Laureltine giggled.

"Robbie writes charming verses—always some for my birthday. He writes ripping music, too. I shall sing you a song he wrote for me, Walter. You need educating."

She moved over to the piano with the lazy grace of one who knows she is perfectly beautiful and needn't worry, and sang:

"Some people say that there surely will come
a time
Sad and unsatisfied, ghostly and gray;
Love is so sweet in our springtide and sum-
mertime,
Dear! Let's kiss while we may!"

"Who wants the banquet of life but a crumb
a time?
Who knows how soon they will call us
away?
Let's beggar Love in our springtide and sum-
mertime,
Dear! Let's kiss while we may!"

Sir Walter fidgeted restlessly.

"I'm afraid I've absolutely no use for that sort of sickly tosh. You should hear our regimental marching song, all about fighting! Some song, I can tell you! Nobody knows who wrote it—"

"No? Really?" murmured Laureltine. She got up from the piano and drifted past him, a sight to exasperate the gods. "I'm going to bed, if you don't mind, Walter. I'm rather sleepy. Good night!"

Yet, strangely enough, she read for an hour before attempting to sleep.

II.

Laureltine, supine in a cane lounge, dreamy with cushions, watched Mr. Henry Robson, shabby with an attractive shabbiness, render first aid to a fishing rod suffering from some mysterious complaint.

"Robbie," she began at last, "you know I'm beautiful, don't you?"

"Your lips are like a thread of scarlet and your speech is comely," reported Mr. Robson, in spite, or because,

of his gray hairs. "Why insist upon the obvious?"

"Well, but, Robbie, you like doing things for pretty girls."

"Princess, I am your dog as always. Pray state exactly what this trouble is."

"I want to be rid—or is it ridded?—I want to be ridded of a puppy. He's one of the best people, and he thinks he's going to marry me one day, and that you're rather disreputable and not quite nice for me to know."

"I will give his flesh to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field, if he's not too large," promised Mr. Robson, squinting anxiously at the fishing rod.

"He's a bart. and a sub. in the Cornish Guards, and he tells me father's regiment isn't so bad."

Mr. Robson laid aside his toil.

"Princess, I'll do anything in the world for you, but please don't mix me up with any puppy soldiers. Old as I am, my feelings get the better of me in these cases."

The princess smiled compassionately.

"Poor Robbie! It's an awful shame! But you—you only—can deliver me. I couldn't trust any one else. He's got to be shocked, and you're the only man I know with whom I dare behave shockingly. You see, I can trust you, Robbie."

She laid a hand caressingly on his tweed sleeve. He capitulated unwillingly.

"Why go to all this trouble? Why not simply tell him the truth about himself and let him go?"

"I can't be rude to him, Robbie—not very. He's a guest, and mother wouldn't like it. Neither should I, of course. Besides, it'll be a good deed. He needs awakening, and he has broad lands and is a bart., and some poor girl must marry him some day, I suppose. We shall be doing her a good turn."

Mr. Robson sighed.

"What must I do, then, princess?"

"Only ask us to tea to-morrow."

"Very well. You are asked—both of you."

Laureltine got up, straightened her headgear, and whistled to her alleged terrier.

"On behalf of Sir Walter Giffard and myself, I accept with much pleasure," she said graciously.

III.

Laureltine poured out Mr. Robson's tea with delicate charm, while Mr. Robson performed the duties of host with that distinction which one would have expected in a friend of Laureltine's. Sir Walter Giffard, in a field-service uniform by his regiment's hereditary tailor, seemed inclined to be a little sulky. He had discovered Mr. Robson, whom he had called an—ah—person, to be older and wiser than he, a far greater favorite with Laureltine, exceedingly well brought up.

"Have some more cake, Giffard," suggested the genial host blandly. "If we don't eat our share, Laureltine will only make herself sick. Nevertheless, I always think childish greed is very beautiful, don't you? Because it's so natural."

"Really," replied Sir Walter stiffly, "I can't imagine Miss Shaw overeating. One only expects that of housemaids and that sort of people."

Laureltine, lounging on a chesterfield beside Mr. Robson, exhibiting more stocking than was her wont, pinched that gentleman severely.

"Robbie, you're a perfect *pig!*" she giggled flapperishly. "I shall never let you kiss me again if you say such things!"

Sir Walter froze where he sat. Even Mr. Robson was staggered for a moment, since he had never known Laureltine to be flapperish in all their history. Moreover, he had yet to kiss her.

"Princess, you are too cruel," he re-

torted with the *savoir-faire* of age. "Still, you are a creature of star dust and roses, and I am an old man. Youth clings to youth."

He gloomed sentimentally at Sir Walter.

"If you mean Walter, he's awfully proper. He can't play leapfrog anything like as well as you can, Robbie, can you, Walter?"

"I've never attempted to play leapfrog with *ladies*," said Sir Walter heavily.

"It's like mixed hockey—a straight path to hospital," asserted Mr. Robson. He was doing his best.

Laureltine sidled along the chesterfield with sinuous, catlike motion.

"You aren't being very nice to me, Robbie," she complained, "and this old sofa isn't very comfy." Gravely and deliberately she seated herself on Mr. Robson's knee. "I don't suppose Walter will be jealous. He doesn't love me half so much as you do, Robbie dear. He thinks I'm a naughty little girl, but I'm not really, am I?"

Sir Walter rose and clicked his heels together as subalterns in the Cornish Guards are taught to do, even if they are taught nothing else.

"I think perhaps I'm a little superfluous. I'll wait outside to take you home, Laureltine."

He passed out with military tread. Laureltine gazed after him entranced.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings!" "Superfluous" is the very word!"

She stood up and looked at Mr. Robson, a faint color in her cheeks.

"You have at least the grace to be ashamed, princess," he said severely. "I think I shall ask your mother to slap you. It isn't fair, even to an old man."

Laureltine held out her hand almost humbly.

"You're a brick, Robbie. You know I can trust you," she said gratefully.

"Yes—that's the worst of it!" groaned Mr. Robson, taking the hand and looking every moment of his years.

IV.

"So I have asked your mother to let me terminate my visit to-morrow," continued Sir Walter Giffard, alone with Laureltine in the drawing-room after dinner. "You will understand that after this afternoon—"

He paused.

"No," replied Laureltine. "I don't think I do understand."

She was rather a different Laureltine this evening, considerably more grown up. Sir Walter coughed.

"It is probably no secret to you that I came here with the idea of becoming engaged to you, Laureltine. I know my mother hinted as much to yours. When I first met you, after some years, I thought you one of the most charming girls I had ever seen. I regret that after this afternoon my opinion has changed. Consequently there is no reason to prolong my visit."

For a moment Laureltine's eyes blazed. Then she laughed.

"You're a little out of date, Walter.

One doesn't bespeak a wife nowadays—not from girls like me, at any rate. The Victorian period's over. My good ass, haven't you got any sense of humor? Can't you see I can have my pick of dozens of youths like you?"

"There are not dozens of men like me," objected Sir Walter. "My family is—"

"Oh, oh, *damn* your family!" said Laureltine, and walked out of the room.

She went slowly up to her mother's sitting room and dropped into a chair.

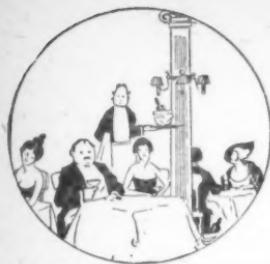
"Thank Heaven that exhausting person's going!" she groaned. "He has the cheek to object to my manners, mother, because Robbie and I rather did it on him this afternoon. Still, he asked for it."

She told the story of the doing. Laureltine's mother smiled. She also made a mental note to comfort Mr. Robson, being a lady of imagination.

"Mother," complained Laureltine, "why are all men under thirty so impossible?"

"I suppose," hazarded Laureltine's mother, "because it takes a varying number of women, from their mothers and nurses onward, about thirty years to break them in."





A Ballad of East and West

By Bonnie Ginger

Author of "The Voice in the Violin,"
"That Morbid Whale," etc.

East is East, and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet.

—Kipling.

THE two strong men stood face to face in the little Indiana town of Hoodville, which had summoned to itself all its absent sons and daughters to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary as county seat—that is, man's judgment seat—and the opening of the new viaduct.

Dud Griffith had come on from Butte, Montana, and Steven Carroll from New York. Fifteen years before, and during the dozen years preceding that, they had been pals through the vagaries and vicissitudes of Hoodville boy life. The fact that the last decade had swept them from each other's ken did not lessen their pleasure now in recalling the old kid days; and all would have gone well and there would have been no story—at least, not this one—had they restricted themselves to that mutual past. Such would have been their course had they been, say, sixty-seven instead of twenty-seven. Now the present engaged their closer attention, and those two presents were divergent to the point of the antipathetic.

Perhaps I can illustrate this divergence by saying that Dud had ceased to be Dudley, even officially, whereas Steven had ceased to be Steve, even unofficially. Not that the East had made Steven an aesthete. "Steven" looked better in the signatures he painted in the corners of his canvases—excellent canvases, by the way, and

just beginning to sell. On the other hand, "Dud," signed in facsimile at the end of the column called "The Cactus Bed," in the Butte City Bugle, was of a piece with the pep that went into the text of that daily feature.

Was Steven a typical artist? Was Dud a typical newspaper man? What are these typicalities? I don't know, having seen too many of both tribes. Steven was dark and pale, but he did not have long hair or dreamy eyes. Dud was stocky, with a questing gaze and a mouth that knew not cigar, cigarette, or pipe. But that each was typical of the region of his adoption I can and do aver.

The Griffiths had died off, excepting an uncle of Dud's and other minor relatives, but the Carrolls were in full blast, and with them stayed Steven, in the big, hideous house on Maple Avenue, while Dud took his suit case to the Metropolitan Hotel.

But they met everywhere and, having come from the ends of the earth, were the most conspicuous visitors to the anniversary and viaduct ceremonies, outside of the governor and Congressman Clumph. And indeed these last two soon faded from mind by departing on the second day, whereas Dud and Steve stayed not only for the third and last day, but for over a week afterward.

Dud wore dark suits and a Panama

hat. Steven carried out the traditions of artistic attire by means of white flannels and a red tie, also a cane.

Steven was staying on to visit his folks, and Dud was staying on because Steven was, but not entirely from excess of zeal for his old pal's company, pleasurable though it was to reconstruct those kid days and to visit the old swimming pool and to eat noon dinners in the houses of the now married members of the original gang. And to explain his reason, it is necessary to abandon for a moment the friendship theme and to introduce another, or, rather, the other—the theme of Etta Beecher.

They did not remember Etta; they only perceived that she must have been. Indeed, fifteen years before, she had been *at* only about four—though Steven did think, on seeing her now, that he recalled a Beecher child who had had copper hair and blue-glass eyes. When he mentioned this memory feat to Etta herself, he used the words "Titian" and "turquoise," impressing her very favorably.

She, now *at* nineteen, was teaching second grade in the Main Street school. She also sang soprano at the Unitarian church; and it was that same voice which, dressed in pale blue and wearing a chrysanthemum at its belt, had proclaimed the achievements of Hoodville in the anniversary and viaduct hymn, composed by the organist of the aforementioned church.

Dud Griffith, in the front row at Chautauqua Hall, where these festivities had been held, had said, "Well, that young lady can sure sing!" Steven Carroll, seated beside him, had said, "She's a pretty girl," and had mentally sketched her in pastels. But that was before they had met her. They had managed to meet her immediately afterward. And they had made a joint engagement to call on her the next afternoon at the little cottage where she lived with her invalid mother.

Now the two themes can join. Indeed, they join of themselves.

"So you've always lived here in the East?" said Dud, who had arrived first. "Well, it's a nice, quiet part of the country, fertile and steady-going. But you must come West some day, Miss Etta. That's God's country, out there."

"I do want to see your wonderful West," was her eager reply. "I'm really saving my money for a trip next summer. But it takes so much!" She smiled into his tanned, rugged face.

"Yes, but it's worth it. I've lived all over the place out there—Arizona, Colorado, California, Washington, Montana—and I tell you—"

But at that point Steven arrived, and at once she felt the effect of his calm metropolitanism, just as she had felt the effect of Dud's Western breeziness. And she said, presently:

"To think of Hoodville's two most celebrated native sons meeting here in this little parlor!"

"We're thinking of just that privilege," said Steven, and she thought how easily these New Yorkers could turn a phrase.

"But it isn't only Hoodville that calls you celebrated," she said.

Steven smiled.

"That's the way out here in the West—such generous acceptance of talent! In fact, a bit too generous, for, after all, it's criticism that makes people get on."

"Ah, yes. New York is critical, isn't it?" She had an impetuous way of speaking and looking. "I've a friend who's gone there to study voice, and she says it's so sophisticated, she feels like a little mouse. She's afraid to sing."

"Well, yes, at first one feels that way. I remember when I went there, I was so obscure, I felt so abject. But nevertheless, that's what makes a fellow, if he has the stuff in him."

"Now, I don't agree, Steve," Dud broke in. "That's the very thing that ruins most young talent. It's the glad hand and the pat on the back that brings out the real stuff in folks. All this loneliness and fear and humility the young stranger feels in that big town of yours is just so much wastage of good material. Our way, out West, conserves all these young feelings, and that's why things grow big out there, the atmosphere is so genial. We don't throw away young strength—we use it. You folks here in the East can't realize what we have out there. I was just telling Miss Etta she ought to come out and see, and so ought you. Your New York is all right, probably, but the trouble with you fellows is you never recognize any other part of the country. I've met thousands of you out West, and it's always the same with you. You look around a little, and then you beat it back East here, and you haven't begun to see what we've got. Even when you're looking, you're thinking of your New York, and talking about it, like a kid that can't stay away from its mother."

"I admit, Dud, you Westerners act differently when you come to New York. You talk about the West for a while, but pretty soon you've hunted up a habitat, and you're staying in the place you first pretend to despise."

"We may stay because the market's bigger, but even that won't be the case always, Steve. We've all sorts of genius out there now, and plenty of atmosphere. Oh, the West isn't the crude thing you pretend to think it is."

"It isn't crude, I agree, Dud. Think of the talent we've encountered right out here in little Hoodville!" And he looked at Etta.

"That's right, Steve. Hoodville's on the map, too!" said Dud. "Right back here in this little town, I've heard one of the nicest voices I ever listened to, or longed to listen to again."

"But could I sing before you two?" smiled Etta. "You, who've heard really big people—"

"We want to hear *you*, don't we, Steve?"

"Certainly. But Miss Beecher mayn't be in the mood—"

"There you go! Moods! You artists and your temperaments! But I know that a girl with a lovely voice wants to give others the pleasure of hearing it, just as I want to give my readers their column every day, and if we were in New York now, you'd want us to see your pictures, isn't that so?"

"It isn't that I'm so generous," said Etta, going to the piano. "I really like to sing."

So she did sing, many times. In fact, that first evening was almost entirely musical, for presently Dud joined in. Steven had no singing voice, he said. I might mention that these were ante-bellum days, before all topics and interests gave way to that one sinister subject, the war.

On the way home, Dud sang the praises of Etta's voice.

"Well," said Steven, "it's a sweet voice, but utterly untrained—or worse, trained wrong."

"There you go again, Steve!" Dud was impatient. "Criticizing! So afraid you'll really enjoy yourself and admire something, or be spontaneous! All you New Yorkers are that way! Anything not made in Gotham isn't right!"

"Now, Dud, that isn't so. I was keenly appreciative of Miss Beecher's beauty and personality, if not of her voice—or of yours, either, by the way."

"I'd rather shout out any old tune," said Dud, "than sit still looking bored."

"I wasn't bored. I was thinking how I might paint her."

Whatever Steven's interest in her was, it drew him daily to the little cottage, and he did sketch her in pastels, very brilliantly. Dud was equally at-

tracted, and his admiration also found outward expression, in descriptions of her incorporated in a little article he was inspired to write of the visit to the old home town. He was a steady worker, and he intended some day to do regular literary stuff. He read these bits to Etta, when he saw her alone, for he and Steven had begun to make separate engagements. Steven said he couldn't stand her singing, and Dud was always getting her to do it.

Etta, flattered, found herself in the position of the donkey between two haystacks. When Dud was with her, her heart would beat for the West he was always talking about, for she was an impetuous, eager girl, with a mind and a spirit much too big for Hoodville. And when he saw that she liked these descriptions, he extended them, so that she was coming to see and almost feel that young, glorious country out there—the trackless forests, the shouldering ranges, the dawn glow of disembodied peaks, the red thunder of the cañon-inclosed streams, the sagebrush under the painted sky, the stillness of the trail, the silken fall of slender cataracts, the comradeship of the desert stars, the song of sawmills, the surge of deep rivers, the peeping of the anemone from the melting drifts on the windward slopes, the lift of a ride over the mesas, the tang of dawns, the fierceness of day, the profoundness of night. And Dud's eyes would shine.

"Yes, it's the heights, the silences, the solitudes, the aloneness—but never loneliness. Oh, I can't really tell it, but if I were an artist, I'd paint it for you, Etta!"

"The movies have shown me a little," she would breathe, "but you make me feel!"

"Oh, movies don't give it at all. You've got to *see* it."

"Well, Etta," Steven would be saying to her, perhaps within the very

hour, "I don't know how to put it into words. If I were a writer—But, anyhow, it gets you—New York. It's the constant change of it—the shops, the shoppers, the traffic, the wealth and fashion and artistry, say, of Fifth Avenue. Or maybe it's another phase—Grand Street near Little Hungary; or the Penn Station, where sound is sopped up into a vague murmur that blends with the haze among the pillars and the murals. And there's Broadway at night, and not hollow, as they say, for it's holiday, and holidays are sane and fundamental.

"Or take the Park across from the Plaza on a fall evening, when the lights come out and the reflections hang in the pond. Take even the subway, that underground ride of the Valkyries, the crashing orchestration of express trains and locals. Or Bryant Park in a blizzard, with the big library beyond the swirling snow. Or a misty night at Madison Square, the hansom standing in line, and the lights on the wet asphalt, and Diana poised on her tower, and the far-up prow of the Flatiron plowing through the fog like a vague ship at sea, and the Met light striking the hour in red. Or the Arch when the big flakes are falling without wind. These are just a handful of phases, as they come to my mind, and what it all is I can't say, I don't know. Only, it's the throngs, the noise, the lights, the contact, the sense of being with hordes of other human creatures all on much the same errands—"

"I suppose movies don't convey these things at all?" she ventured.

He laughed.

"Not in the least! How could they? One has to see."

"And shall I see, some day?" she mused.

"Why not? You want to study singing."

"But the money it takes!"

"One can do it fairly cheaply, if one

doesn't mind what one wears, and, if one can be content with a little attic down, say, in Greenwich."

"I'd love that! And I could live on almost nothing."

"I did that, and I pulled through."

It was true he had done that, and he had pulled through. But the struggle, however much it had made him artistically, had taken a lot out of him physically. Etta had noted the languor of his movements. She was only nineteen, but there were things, O Dud and Steven, that she didn't have to be told.

She knew they were falling in love with her. And she knew that with Dud love was a rare experience, and that with Steven it was not.

One day, before their fortnight was up, each voiced his feelings.—

Dud asked her to marry him. She refused, gently. He did not seem quite convinced.

"Just the same, there's a little Eastern girl I'm going to believe will see this thing the way I do, some day."

Steven's declaration was more subtle, and less committal.

"Here I've gone and fallen in love with a maid of the West," he said ruefully. "She hasn't known me long enough to know if she could ever come to love me, but she's going to come East and study singing, and then maybe I'll have a chance."

So that was how it stood when they went away. Dud said that she was coming West; Steven knew that she was coming East. She herself hadn't the faintest idea which would prove to be right.

Dud wrote regularly all winter, and sent post cards as well.

Steven wrote at first, not regularly, but fascinatingly. Then came only post cards—artistic ones, of course, copies of pastels and the like—and she would set them up beside each other, his and Dud's—"Cedars on the slopes of Rainier" along with "Evening, City Hall

Square"—and gaze at them, pulled both ways by her growing longing.

After Christmas Steven's cards ceased. She had known he would forget.

Dud didn't forget, or even lapse.

She was saving her money now, or spending it on traveling togs, but whether their destiny lay eastward or westward she still couldn't tell, so she said little of her summering, even to Dud, though she now answered his letters rather more promptly.

Then that tigress, Fate, grew sportive, and in her play her careless tail upset the little edifices of three people's lives and plans.

First, there was Dud writing—or, rather, wiring:

Am offered job New York paper. Stop over Hoodville March 5th and 6th.

He arrived on time, and almost his first words went into the urging of Etta to give up the Western trip for this summer and come East instead.

"We'd see that New York together, and maybe you'd stay and study voice. And I'd be there to look after you. What about it, Etta?"

She was tempted. The truth was that Dud had improved in this last winter. She thought he seemed very strong and splendid, and he gave off such fire and ambition. And she, too, was beginning to dream ambitiously.

"But I needn't come *this* summer, Dud. Any summer would do, for once you get to New York, you'll stay there. Steven says they all do."

"I can't help what Steve says. I certainly shall not stay there. But a year or two, to polish off and establish myself—I need that. For I mean to do regular stories some day. Then you'll come East, Etta?"

But though she didn't decide, he went away with his mind full of her. Nor was her mind unoccupied by thoughts of him.

He could hardly have reached New York before the news came—not to Etta, but to his folks, from whom it filtered down—that Steven Carroll was going to be in Hoodville by the end of the month, on his way to Arizona. This was the second switch of the tigress' tail, and its real significance was made known to Etta by Dud, who had seen Steven and to whom Steven had confided the truth.

"In short, Etta, he's got a bad lung. He doesn't look so sick, however—only pale and languid. But he lives in a queer part of the town they call 'the Village,' in a dark old house. Atmospheric—that's his word for it. But give me God's sunlight. No wonder he's teebeocular. But he's a nice kid, and New York's a great town, I'll say that for it."

And descriptions followed, very animated and readable, and all calculated to inspire Etta with enthusiasm.

But were those descriptions now of avail? For Steven was not going to be in New York. Etta was ashamed to discover that Steven remained a factor. But the shame passed from her when he reached Hoodville and came, that very first day, to call.

It was the Easter vacation, and he was staying exactly one week.

He said nothing about his failure to write, and she liked that simplicity.

"Of course you'll take your trip this summer, Etta? And why don't you come West? All teachers go to see the Yellowstone and the Grand Cañon and the glaciers and those things—and I could knock around with you, if you'd let me. Think what a time we'd have! Otherwise, I'll be hideously lonely, not knowing a soul and my thoughts turning in on myself—and one doesn't get well that way. I'd show you how to sketch in pastels."

"Oh, would you do that, Steven? I've always longed to do pastels. At

school the drawing teacher always said I had a talent for landscape."

The week wasn't half up before she began to see herself riding horseback with Steven over the sagebrush, for he meant to spend his time in the saddle. She looked up riding habits in the Sears-Roebuck catalogue.

There was no gainsaying the spell of Steven when he was in the beguiling mood, and now his condition added glamour. And, moreover, he now had the ring of sincerity in his pleadings. For Etta had grown in charm and ripeness. In short, he wondered that he had so easily forgotten her. He was quite sure he could never pay her that ill compliment again. Such was her charm for him that he even got her to sing.

"I really want to go East and study voice," she reminded him.

"But they have instructors out West, Etta. I know a lot of Frisco people of the highest talent."

He fancied he could ride in from Arizona to Frisco to call on her. But Steven did not know how Dud had been implanting seeds in her to lure her to New York. She was instinctive rather than clever in keeping the two men from seeing that each other's interest in her was anything but sheer friendship.

He left her his photograph and a book of reproductions of his best paintings, and took with him a sketch he made of her in crayon. Post cards punctuated his voyage westward, and notes and letters came from wherever he stopped over.

But it was now poor Etta's own turn with that careless feline, Fate. Mrs. Beecher, in early June, became ill, and Etta could not even finish her term, but took her mother to a sanitarium in Indianapolis. And there the summer was spent in alternate hopes and fears, and at sad expenditure as well.

Dud and Steven were both very nice,

and kept her entertained by letters, but in these missives they betrayed a humor so unconscious that she was more entertained than they knew.

Knowing she could take no trip at all this year, Dud ceased to praise New York to her. He disparaged it and its people.

"But I'm not licking the hand that feeds me," he explained, and sent her his first articles, a series of breezy, caustic stuff, in so-called Western vernacular, featured as "Cactus Dud's" and immediately popular, because New York loves to read these snappy attacks on itself, as a mother cat likes to watch her kittens playing all over her, for if they play too roughly, she can slap them.

And at the same time Steven, out in Arizona, was suffering in his temperament, though his body was strengthening. The crudeness bothered him, and the loneliness, the lack of atmosphere—the place of which could never be filled, he said, with mere climate—of contact, of background.

He was painting, however.

"But they don't understand my stuff. They like the raw colors. And the prices they think handsome, Etta! It's pathetic! But I'll stick it out for a year."

In September, Mrs. Beecher was well enough for Etta to come home and teach again. But just before Christmas she died.

So now Etta was free to study voice if she wished. She did wish, and while continuing school, she went up to Indianapolis twice a week to an instructor, as a preliminary for the New York education, upon which she had now decided.

"All right, and we'll travel East together," wrote Steven, pleased. "Ah, Etta, when I start showing you that city on the bay! Can I wait? But I'm getting terribly well, so I'll make myself contented somehow."

But he was more contented almost immediately, for he wrote that he had got an automobile and fitted it up for camping and was knocking around painting, wherever his fancy took him.

In the early spring Dud's first story appeared. It was Western, and it took so well that he followed it at once with another—"things I wrote two or three years ago, but I've polished them up. I've been learning style," he explained. Etta was greatly impressed. And to write these stories he had given up the Cactus Dud feature, and all newspaper work, and he signed himself Dudley G. Griffith.

"And I'm working on a new story now, Etta—one about the—— But I'll not tell you till it's out."

It came out in May. It was not a Western story. It was a story about New York.

"Don't think I forget my West, Etta. God knows how impossible that would be. Sometimes I could chuck everything here, for the longing for my West comes like a drunkard's cravings for drink. I could take a train West and never stop off *even at Hoodville*; that's the way it hits me at times. But, after all, to love one thing, you don't have to stop loving another, and I'll be frank to say this New York has hit me amidships. *It's a great old town!* You'll like it, Etta. And you're to be here soon now. That helps to keep me here when the other longing gets too strong."

She compared that letter with the one from Steven that said:

"If I could just have one day of my town, Etta! Sometimes I'd rather be there with half a lung than anywhere else with two—or three or four!"

It was nothing less than Dud's New York story, which she had sent on to him, that wrung this cry from his exiled heart.

Steven cast his return for June, when Etta's school would be out, so that they could travel East together. She had

told him and Dud how she had already sold the little cottage, salting down the proceeds for her voice-studying career.

But poor Steven had to be disappointed about that journey East with Etta. She was not quite ready to start, and he was unable to wait for her, because he had to see some people who were leaving New York for the summer.

The reason she was not starting was the wedding of an old friend in Indianapolis, at which she was to be bridesmaid. She showed him the Indianapolis papers with the advanced notices. And now he cursed the selfishness that had inspired him to arrive when school was just at its closing, instead of coming a few days before. But the fact was that he hated to spend any more time with his people than was necessary. They didn't understand him, and they were awkward with him, and he with them. Moreover, school exercises were boring; and then, once started homeward—that is, toward New York—he felt that he couldn't endure much delay on the way. But now he saw that he had planned foolishly, for the very day he arrived, Etta was leaving for Indianapolis. She had promised to help the friend get ready for the wedding, and her own little wardrobe was being made in the city, too.

Steven observed her—how the year had changed and ripened her—yet she was the same impetuous, ingenuous girl. He thought of her advent in New York, of the sensation she would make there next winter, and he told her so, and she was pleased, saying she had feared that when he again saw the metropolitan women—those clever, expert, intelligent women—he would find her only a little country girl, after all. How he laughed at that idea!

She did, however, begin to believe in her voice. The instructors at Indianapolis had given her great hopes. Steven didn't set great store by those in-

structors, nor did he care much about her voice; it was herself he thought of, and of how she had the true talent of loveliness and charm.

"But you'll come on right after the wedding, Etta?"

"Oh, yes, I'm not even coming back here to Hoodyville."

And that satisfied him. He saw her off on the train, and then put in two very dragging days with his people. One thing she had allowed him to do, and that was to look out an attic for her in New York.

It was the first of July when he reached home. The city was already thinned of the people he knew; others were preparing to go. There were those, of course, who couldn't leave, either at all or until later, but these would all have been away if they could. The spring's activities had left a lassitude, and a hot spell added its effect. They were, in other words, sick to death of the city they loved. This seemed horrible to Steven.

That was why Dud Griffith appeared to him in the guise of a godsend. Dud in New York was like a young collie in a prairie-dog town, nosing every hole in the quest of game, with the collie's instinct of sheer sport as well.

"I've already material to last a year, Steve, but I just can't stay off the trail. Every day, and a dozen times a day, I find places and people and things it seems simply tragic to miss. Oh, it's a town! It's a town!"

"Yes, isn't it?" And Steven, the exile, basked in the presence of it all like a lizard on a rock. So, when Dud's morning stint was finished—Dud always worked of mornings—they two would set forth, every day, coming back late at night either to Steven's studio or to Dud's rooms near by, for Dud had settled in the Village after all. There they would talk until two or three. Thus they passed the week that lay like

a broidered carpet between them and the threshold of next week, over which Etta was to step into her career—and theirs.

Steven found the attic for her, and spent happy moments thinking out the decorations, for she had asked him to help her in that.

"Well, Dud, I guess your West is a great country, after all."

"You had to come to it, didn't you, Steve?"

"Yes, I came to it. At first it was lonesome, but that's the bigness, I expect. When I got my car and went knocking around, camping here and there—"

"Oh, camping! Now you're talking!"

"Yes, and I worked up into Colorado first, up the San Luis Valley—"

"God—the Snowy Range!" breathed Dud, his eyes shining.

"Then up past Leadville—"

"There's a little lake in behind Leadville—Uneeva Lake," broke in Dud.

"I know. I found it. Then up through Steamboat. Then I worked in toward the Virgin. I remember one night in a little limestone cañon. There was a stream in it, and a cottonwood grove, and a couple of regular old Klondike prospectors. I made a sketch of them I think rather good."

Dud was hardly breathing. His eyes stuck out of his head.

"Oh, God, Steve, shut up! I can't stand it! I can keep from thinking of it, but when some one who's just been there comes and talks about it—I'd go back, only I've started this story stuff, and if I got out there, I'd forget New York."

"You'd come back."

"I wonder. I wonder, Steve." And after a silence, he said: "I've noticed this—it's the Westerner who has the open heart. He *knows* there's nothing like his West, but if he comes here, he can get this, too. But your average

Easterner goes out there, and he doesn't stretch. But you're different. You've stretched."

"Well," Steven mused, "I'll tell you, I think maybe it's this tourist business that's really the trouble. But when you go and really see a place—knock about in it, get to know it—then you understand it."

"You're right. My liking for New York was superficial at first. Staying here and working with it has given me the understanding. Yes, God, Steve, it's a town!"

So they would go out and bum around some more—these two who had forgotten that they hailed originally from a place that was neither East nor West—seeping up the color, the motion, the noise, and coming home and putting their ridiculous feelings into words and paint.

"Well, to-day we'll surely hear from her."

The week was up. Etta was nearly due.

"Yes, she ought to be here right now, and she knows we're to meet her at the train."

"Maybe she'll wire."

They were restless all that day, going back and forth to see if there were a message or a letter. In the late afternoon, Dud was at Steven's studio, and there a diversion happened. Steven's canvases arrived from the West.

Dud didn't wait to see them all unpacked, but he at least saw that Steven had been doing some really good work.

"Yes, you do like the West, old fellow. That's real interpretation. Now we can make Etta see what we mean when we talk of God's country." He went over to his rooms, humming.

A few moments later, he was on the phone.

"Steve, say, listen! She's here!"

"What's that?"

"She's here! No, not here, but in

New York. She just phoned—from the Alliston."

"The Alliston!" It was a little hotel across the Square.

"And she wants us to come right over."

"Oh. Well, I'll be along in a minute."

And on the way, Steven wondered why she had waited till she got here, and why she had gone to the Alliston.

In the lobby they waited, very impatiently. But she did not keep them long.

She was a vision of rare loveliness as she came to meet them, radiant, glowing, magnetic.

"Oh, how jolly to see you! And Dud, what a glorious fellow you've grown to be!"

"But why didn't you write, Etta, or at least wire?"

"Oh, bother!" Steven cut in. "Here she is. That's enough."

"But I wanted to surprise you."

"And you did, didn't you?"

"But I'm not through." She was suddenly blushing. They gazed at her.

"Yes, something's happened—something wonderful and—oh, just wonderful! Something I didn't know about until—well, until just before you came to Hoodville, Steven, and even then I wasn't at all sure. That's why I didn't say anything."

"Is it money?"

"Money? Oh, no! Something so much more marvelous than money—" She broke off, laughing gayly, yet with a self-conscious blush. "But I'll tell you plain. It's—well, then—I'm married."

The silence that fell was punctuated by the sudden argument of two elevator boys down the hall.

"A pianist—the pianist, Jules Leblanc. Yes, I'm Madame Leblanc—and he's taking me to France, to Paris, to study! I'm to go to Paris! To Paris! We sail to-morrow night."

The argument of the elevator boys

rose to a loud climax and stopped at the sound of the elevator bell.

"He was a friend of my instructor in Indianapolis, and he was there giving a concert, and we met, and—and he says I have a voice. Isn't it wonderful? I, too, shall be famous, maybe, and Hoodville will be proud of me, too. I know you're glad for me," she ended, a little lamely.

"It's such a surprise, Etta." Steven had found his voice first.

"Yes, I know we all planned on New York, and it seemed very thrilling to me to come here, but, you see, I hadn't met Jules."

"We're very glad, and we wish you every happiness," said Dud, after wetting his lips. He was a shade paler than Steven.

"And do think of it—Paris!" she cried. "I try and try to really believe it! But see—here comes Jules!"

A little flabby man was approaching with undue majesty. He had a small, receding forehead, palely thatched, and prominent, conceited eyes and a tiny, insufferable mouth. On being presented to "my very best friends in New York," he made graceful observations about his pleasure, about his gratitude to the two friends who had believed in madame's voice and had encouraged her to cultivate it, for how else would he have ever met her? And would they not dine with them?

But they did not dine anywhere. They went to some café and drank and drank and drank, these two friends of madame's.

Madame's! Paris!

"And I hoped to marry her!" said Dud.

"What? Well, then, Dud—I'll be equally frank. I had the same ambition."

And the two stared with blank eyes into a black, bottomless abyss.

"And she's not even taking the trouble to look over New York," said Ste-

ven, as they wended their very late way to his studio.

"And here are your pictures of the West we were to show her——"

"No, she couldn't see them if she were looking right at them. All she can see is a pasty-faced, raisin-eyed piano player!"

"Well, let's see the pictures," said Dud, thinking of possible solace.

And when they had looked at them a long time, he said:

"I'm going back out there. My writing doesn't mean a hoot in hell to me now. I'm going to chuck it and go back West."

"We'll go together," said Steven. "I'd like to go on with these—well, what you're so very kind as to call interpretations. And the air here seems

so close and sweaty and human. I got rather fond of that air out there; and the contacts, the types; and the peaks and the cottonwoods and cañons and sagebrush and the stars! I've my car out there still, fixed up for camping, and I'll go back and stay till late fall, anyhow."

Dud packed to go with him. But he did not go.

"This story stuff's started off so well. I've got in the spirit of New York. Maybe I'd be a fool to chuck it now. I'd better wait another year."

So, one day in the Penn Station, two strong men—or weak, as you prefer—stood face to face saying good-by, and the East went West, and the West stayed East—as was most fitting and meet.



THE PHILANDERER

SOMEWHERE there is a girl for me,
The one and perfect pearl for me,
Who's made by fate to be my mate, the comrade of my soul;
But in what clime or latitude
She dwells, my life's beatitude,
Is quite unknown and only shown on fortune's secret scroll.

And if I gaze meanwhile upon
The other maids, and smile upon
The lasses sweet whom I may meet by happy circumstance,
Such light and harmless merriment
Is simply an experiment
To help me find the one designed to be my True Romance.

So if I follow all of them,
And yield me to the thrall of them,
And seem to prize the light of eyes that gayly gleam and shine,
The reason is, I'm groping for
The destiny I'm hoping for,
And if I fail to cross her trail—the fault will not be mine!

BERTON BRALEY.



A Romantic Liar

By Lawrence Perry

Author of "Dan Merrithew,"
"Prince or Chauffeur," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

IT is the custom of civilization that families shall feast and be joyful on Christmas Day. Happy the family that can do both. The Lowell family, lacking its brightest and most beautiful ornament, dined soberly in the house on Gramercy Park. Caleb Lowell, curiously enough, was the one whose demeanor held most of yuletide suggestiveness. The lift given him by Tommy Elwell—acting, as we know, at the instance of Trent—had been a veritable life buoy. His margins were beginning to be real margins in all that the term implies, and he was making ready to quit and pocket his fairly substantial gains.

Of course he recognized the influence of Trent in the life belt that had been thrown him, but far from guessing the motives that had inspired this act, he accepted it as a tacit intimation on Trent's part that Doctor Lowell would, in the end, recognize his right to his brother's interest in the Fuel Company stocks. He believed, in fact, that she had already done this, and was merely awaiting the end of the stipulated four weeks as a matter of feminine perversity. She had not mentioned the matter since the occurrence in the library, and the time was almost up.

And so he attacked the turkey and sipped his port with gusto and was ready to converse at length upon any subject that might be introduced, a tendency that found small vent, since his state of mind was shared by neither Doctor Lowell nor Miss Judson. The

latter, indeed, had spent the day dabbing furtive tears from her eyes and casting reproachful glances at her stoical sister. It may be presumed that Doctor Lowell's stoicism was more assumed than real. At all events, she was unusually silent and grim.

"Julia," her sister finally burst forth, as the maid cleared the way for dessert, "I always thought that, underneath all, you really had a heart. I am sorry to say I doubt it now."

Caleb Lowell grunted and chuckled, earning thereby a baleful stare from his wife.

"I suppose you refer to Eleanor, Matilda," she said.

"Yes, to Eleanor!" flashed her sister. "I think we are all positively heartless, sitting here, eating together, with Eleanor alone, probably crying her heart out, convinced that she has been utterly forgotten. I tell you this," she exclaimed with all the intensity of a naturally mild person who has been thoroughly aroused: "I, for one, am going to see that poor, dear girl this afternoon!"

Doctor Lowell eyed her calmly.

"Matilda, you are going to do nothing of the sort."

"Julia, I am going to do just that! I positively refuse to subscribe another hour to this wicked, unjust, vile campaign against the sweetest girl that ever lived!"

Doctor Lowell raised her hand magnificently.

"And you would undo everything that I have been trying to accomplish!"

I suggest that you study Robert Trent's course."

"He is completely under your thumb!" snapped the other woman. "So have we all been. But I, for one, decline to occupy that position any longer. I am of age——"

"I, too, am of age."

"Oh, oh, impossible!" Lowell, laughing over his coffee, sputtered and half strangled, while his wife, ignoring his simian antics, frowned on. "As I say, I, too, am of age and appear to have acquired a degree of common sense with the years. I absolutely forbid your seeing Eleanor until—until——" She turned to her husband. "By the way, Caleb, that reminds me. On January 3d, you are to come to Eleanor's tea room and present the proofs which I asked you to produce, the month being up on that day."

"Eh?" Lowell looked up angrily. "Do you still take me for a fool, or a knave—or what?"

"I'll answer that later," retorted Doctor Lowell. "Now, Matilda, I have been in close touch with our girl, and I know that she is making a mess of things—as is most natural, considering the manner in which she has conducted her enterprise. The time will come when she will be more than willing to confess that she doesn't know quite everything there is to be known. Until that lesson is completely learned, I ask you to leave matters entirely in my hands."

"I shall consider," replied Miss Judson.

"Consider all you wish, but please, if you love Eleanor, do as I say."

"Matilda may do as she pleases, but I'll be——"

"Caleb!" Doctor Lowell arose from the table. "We have had quite enough! Quite!"

She strode out of the room, leaving Lowell, his dinner altogether spoiled, struggling to his feet and her sister

twisting her fingers and declaring that this particular Christmas dinner was worthy only of a family of Hottentots.

It is but just to say that it had required all of Doctor Lowell's stoicism to approach this good day with her niece out of the house. She had missed the girl sorely, and had suffered more than one pang at the thought of one so little prepared to face single-handed the slings and arrows of a world which, opinions to the contrary notwithstanding, can be as cruel and cold to beauty and youth as to anything else.

Doctor Lowell had many friends in the club at which Eleanor was staying and thus had ways of keeping indirectly in touch with her niece's career. When Eleanor was in her room with her sick headache, her aunt had departed from her determination so far as to visit the club daily and insure every precaution for the girl's comfort. In sooth, having given more thought to the whole matter than she well had time to spare, she was glad that the end of the stipulated four weeks was at hand. Doctor Lowell hated unsettled things more than anything in this world. She intended to settle this particular affair with a bang, and for good and all. The day before, a letter had come to her from Trent.

"This mine business looks fearfully messy," he had written. "Your husband disposed of several shares in the stock last September, to James Oliphant of the Excelsior Company, a bitter rival of father's corporation."

Doctor Lowell read this with a little exclamation and, arising, went to her desk, where, after looking over several papers, she returned to the letter with compressed lips.

"It is not to be doubted that Mr. Lowell passed these shares over—for a price—as an earnest of his promise to sell the complete half interest when he comes into control of the stock on Eleanor's birthday. This means that

there will be a bitter and perhaps an endless fight out here between the two companies.

"I told you before I left of that flaw in the foreclosure proceedings under which Adrian Lowell originally secured the stock. By reason of that flaw, father could have forced the stock to revert from your husband to Robert Pinkham under the law, but this would not knock out Mr. Oliphant, Pinkham's stepfather. But, anyway, the flaw no longer exists. Father's Denver lawyers, who have been digging into the case for months, have discovered documents which put a clean aspect upon Adrian Lowell's original title to the half interest in the mine—although undoubtedly Adrian never knew this. So that half interest is solid for Caleb Lowell when Eleanor comes of age. And he is going to sell to the Excelsior. Father is wild, and when I tell him about Eleanor—I mean my feelings—he will certainly raise Cain.

"That won't faze me any. None the less, I'd like to have things pleasant with him, because he and I have got to be pals. His secretary was taken ill the first week, and I have been quite useful to him, fagging for him like a pup. He's a wonderful man, Doctor Lowell. Luckily he's been up to his neck in railroad affairs, getting his house in order against the time when the government takes the Denver & Ogden over, as will be the case, he says. I am writing this to let you know how I've been faring and to ask if you will try to prevail upon your husband to wriggle out of that sale to the Excelsior, if he can. I love Eleanor more every day. We will eat Christmas dinner at a tank station in the Rockies and will be home in perhaps a week. I can't tell precisely. In the meantime, accept my devotion and keep Eleanor for me."

Whole-heartedly did Doctor Lowell share Trent's hopes concerning Eleanor. She had come to have a warm

feeling for this young man who was so unspoiled, although reared with every opportunity and incentive to be otherwise. As to Caleb Lowell and his mining stock, the doctor did not speak to him as Trent had tacitly requested. Instead, she spent hours studying various papers, and in the end filed Trent's letter away with them.

For Eleanor, the holiday week will ever linger in her mind as the blackest and bleakest period in her life. Meteorologically the season was ideal—clear and cold, with flurries of snow, streets crowded with befurried shoppers, holly in the windows, and everywhere the light and hurry and bustle and good cheer of New York's most wonderful season. Thousands coming and going, but how few entering the portals beneath the Sign of the Caddy! Some came, of course. At times—infrequently, it is true—every table was occupied, but Eleanor did not have to figure deeply to know that this should be the case every day if her venture were to be successful.

Her savings account was fast dwindling. She had hoped that at the end of five weeks she would be making thirty dollars a day gross—a modest enough sum, it seemed to her—but now in the fourth week there was no indication that she would make anything like that sum in the sixth or any future week.

She had counted upon her friends for patronage, but she had come to realize the emptiness of such expectation. They did come occasionally, but didn't spend much money—Eleanor, to her disgust, was coming to appraise people by the money they spent—and were inclined to look upon her with a patronizing air. It was as if she had moved to another world. Perhaps this was her imagination, rubbed to undue sensitiveness. Still, it was real to her and it made her feel very badly.

With the multiplication of her trou-

bles had come an attitude of dogged stubbornness toward her aunt, whose neglect of her she had accurately construed as the grim lesson of a grim woman. But she would *not* yield! She was bitterly determined upon that. She would starve in the streets first!

And Robert Trent! She hoped and prayed the day would come when she could make him realize that she was not the silly, gullible idiot he had taken her for. If he had only carried on what he had been about without the caddishness of attempting to make love to her! Ugh!

It was indeed a doleful Christmas Day that this girl passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

New Year's had come and gone. It was a gray January day of a penetrating coldness. Through the windows of the Sign of the Caddy could be seen the flitting forms of passers-by on the sidewalk outside, but none ventured to enter. This was just as well, perhaps, as Eleanor was without help in the front of the little establishment. Her staff had been reduced, through necessity, to one waitress and the cook, and the waitress, without warning, had failed to put in an appearance that morning.

As she sat at her cashier's desk, heartsick and depressed, she was suddenly brought to her feet by a portentous crash of crockery out in the kitchen. With a little exclamation, she hurried out to learn the extent of the damage.

When, with downcast face, she returned, a young man was sitting at one of the tables. There was something familiar about the clean-cut shoulders; something—

"Robert!" she exclaimed, as he looked up. And then, quickly: "Mr. Trent."

Something in her manner brought

him up with a shock, and the smiling words that were upon his lips died away.

"Will you send me a waitress, please?" he asked.

"I—I am acting as waitress for—for the moment," she faltered, her eyes blazing angrily.

"You!" Trent looked at her. "Isn't this a corking little shop? How has it been going, Eleanor?"

She looked at him indifferently.

"Will you give your order, please?" Trent stiffened.

"Oh, of course, Well, I'll have a pot of tea—and a piece of pie. What kind of pies have you?"

"It tells you on the card."

"Where?"

She leaned forward and jabbed her finger venomously at the bottom of the card.

"Right—down—there."

"Oh, yes." Trent followed the pointing finger. "But no. It says, 'All pies, ten cents.' I'll have a piece of gooseberry pie."

She moved away from him and then, changing her mind, returned.

"We haven't gooseberry pie."

"But—but—really!" Trent stared at the menu. "It says, 'All pies—ten cents.'"

"That means," fumed the girl, "that all the pies we have are ten cents."

"Oh. What kind of pies have you, then?"

Eleanor broke down utterly.

"I think you are a beast!" she cried, with a little catch in her voice, and walked away from him.

Trent was upon his feet and at her side in an instant.

"Eleanor, please! Eleanor—dear!" he said in a low voice. "Hasn't all this miserable business gone far enough?" He placed his arm around her shoulders.

"Yes, it has—entirely too far!" she

sobbed. "Please take your arm from me!"

Trent's face was very close to hers.

"Now won't you kiss and be friends, Eleanor?"

"I wish you'd go away!" She jerked herself out of his grasp.

"You don't wish anything of the sort!"

"I do, too!" she declared. "I told you I never wanted to see you again. How did you dare——"

"You never told me you didn't want to see me again."

She took down her handkerchief and looked at him.

"Well, if I didn't, I meant it."

Trent nodded humbly and withdrew a step.

"Very well, Eleanor," he sighed. "Now that I really know how you feel, I'll go. But first," he continued, "I must tell you something I came to say. It's very important."

"It must be," she flashed, "after you've waited a month to tell——" She bit her lip and was about to say something to qualify the implication he might derive from her words, but didn't.

"I was afraid of the police," he smiled, coming close again. "You know you said you'd call one if I followed you. Only think of my position! I thought if I came, you'd go to the door and call a great, big, burly bluecoat and that I'd have to hide under a table, pawing at the hem of that extremely tasteful skirt of yours, pleading with you not to press the charge."

She couldn't suppress a smile.

"You haven't changed a bit, have you?"

He regarded her with softened gaze.

"Not toward you—dear."

She moved a bit toward her desk.

"You told me you had something important to tell me."

"Can you imagine anything more important than what I have said?"

She was nothing if not obdurate.

"Yes, a great many things."

"Oh," Trent stiffened in that way he had, and proceeded formally: "Have you heard from your aunt?"

"You mean Aunt Julia?" she inquired. "No, I haven't. I haven't heard from any one."

The tears were beginning to start afresh. Seeing which, Trent hastened to speak.

"I have come from her on a business matter."

She looked up quickly, with an expression which she could not hide.

"Oh—business! I—thought—I——"

"You thought—what?"

"Why, I thought that of course it must be business."

She attempted to add something, but stammered and failed. Trent waited a moment and then said:

"It looks, Eleanor, as if you would get that interest in your father's company, after all!"

"Is that all?" Her voice was listless.

"Well, there is something that isn't exactly business." Trent moved a step toward her. "I leave for Japan to-morrow——"

"For Japan! Robert!" She stared at him.

"Yes, my uncle, who is in the state department, arranged it. The government wouldn't have me as a fighting man, but there's an important mission to Tokyo leaving to-morrow—secretly, of course—and they've rung me in as secretary at the last moment."

"To-morrow! Tokyo!" Something in her voice brought him nearer to her, but before he could either speak or act, voices were heard outside and the door opened.

CHAPTER XVII.

Doctor Lowell's entrance, anywhere, was always impressive, albeit unintentionally so. But never was her advent so marked by thrill and suspense as

when she stepped over the sill of the tea room. Although her sister followed closely, Doctor Lowell's presence seemed so to fill and dominate the apartment that it was as if she had come in alone. Her eyes swept over the room; then, quite casually, her glance fell upon her niece, who stood hesitating, trembling, not knowing or not caring that Trent's arm had stolen about her shoulders. As the girl and her aunt looked at each other, a little smile stole over the older woman's face.

"Well, my daughter?"

Eleanor gave a low cry, ran to her, and kissed her.

"Aunt Julia! It is so good to see you!" and she ran over to Miss Judson, who received her with copious tears.

Doctor Lowell's next remark was quite in character:

"How much money have you lost so far, Eleanor?"

"Now, Aunt Julia!"

"A goodly sum, I'll be bound. In the first place, Eleanor, a person passing would hardly know it was a tea room. Your sign is too small, and there's nothing else about the exterior to inform one as to the nature of the place."

"Yes," replied Eleanor humbly.

"Then you didn't have a single advertisement in the newspapers—and you've wasted money on decorations." She paused. "Well, well, we won't talk about that. I've come to speak about that trust deed, a month having expired. I should have sent for you to come to my house, but the manner in which you left it forces me to say to you that you may never come back until you ask my pardon for your treatment of me."

"Aunt Julia, I do ask your pardon." The girl embraced her again. "I was just a silly, foolish girl, and I should have known better. Won't you please forgive me?"

Doctor Lowell kissed her.

"There, there, my child! It's all right. Now we're here, we may as well get this matter settled. Your Uncle Caleb will be here shortly. In fact," she added, as the door opened, "he's here now."

It was, indeed, Lowell who entered, accompanied by a fussy, nervous little gentleman, who obviously was ill at ease.

"Good afternoon," said Lowell. "I hope I'm quite in time for this little farce." He looked back over his shoulder. "Come right in, Mr. Doolittle."

His wife followed his glance.

"Yes, Caleb, quite in time. And who is this gentleman, pray?"

"This," said Lowell, "is my attorney, Mr. Doolittle."

"Oh." Doctor Lowell nodded. "Mr. Doolittle, may I ask why you are here?"

"I—I—" The lawyer appeared nonplussed, but continued, as his client nudged him in the back: "I am here to assist my client—and friend—in any way that may appear necessary. Regularity, you know."

"I see. Well, I have no objection to your presence. I'll read the deed of trust, and I prefer no interruptions other than those I see fit to make."

Doctor Lowell disposed herself to read, but the lawyer cleared his throat.

"I'll examine the deed first, if I may."

"You may not," replied the doctor succinctly.

"Now, madame," spluttered Mr. Doolittle, taking every advantage of his short stature, "I take exception to your arbitrary method of procedure!"

"Very well," nodded the doctor. "Now, then"—she straightened the deed out in her hand—"the sections that concern my husband and my niece are all that are necessary to read. Well, sir?" She glanced impatiently over the paper as the lawyer stepped forward.

"May I state," he said, "that I wish

to withdraw from this case? I've a certain amount of professional dignity."

"Then be so good," interrupted Doctor Lowell, "as to sit down and maintain it. Now, then." She read as follows: "I do hereby give unto my said trusted securities of the Western Colorado Fuel Company now owned by me and bearing my assignment in blank—" She looked up. "I want you all to pay particular attention to this." She read rapidly a long list of certificate numbers and then proceeded as follows: "These securities to be held by him intact—"

"Intact!" cried Lowell. "When is this nonsense to end?"

"I cannot tell you that just now, Caleb." She resumed reading: "To be held by him intact and in trust for the following purpose, viz: To deliver the same to my daughter upon her wedding day, if and in the event that she shall join in lawful wedlock with Robert Pinkham, son of my friend and partner, Jonathan Pinkham, on or before her twenty-first birthday. In event that my daughter shall not comply with the foregoing condition, I do hereby direct my said trustee to deliver over said securities unto himself to have and to hold free from any further claim whatsoever."

Her husband stepped forward.

"Well, well, they did *not* marry. They did *not* carry out the engagement as directed. What more? I see no reason for us to remain any longer. Doolittle, the terms of the deed are perfectly clear."

"Yes"—his wife nodded—"perfectly clear. And yet"—she looked up from the paper—"so that it may be as clear to you all as it seems to me and my husband, let me repeat this concluding clause:

"Each and every stipulation contingent or otherwise under my said trustee, Caleb Lowell, is made upon the

express condition that he faithfully and literally carry out all the terms of this instrument as directed in the foregoing provisions and, in event he shall fail in any particular so to do, then, and in that event, he shall forfeit any right whatsoever to any share in my interest as hereinbefore set forth, and I do hereby assign any and all securities so forfeited unto my daughter, Eleanor Erskine Lowell, upon her twenty-first birthday, all other provisions hereinbefore made to the contrary notwithstanding."

She put down the deed and turned to Caleb Lowell.

"Now then, Caleb, are you prepared to swear you have kept those securities intact throughout the term of this instrument?"

Lowell shouted angrily:

"Julia Lowell! The idea of your daring to put to me any such question!"

"Nevertheless," she persisted, "I do put it. Have you?"

He stamped to the door and then returned, confronting her.

"This," he cried, "is intolerable! Certainly I have!"

She nodded and again took up the paper.

"Then why all this excitement? Why this scene?" She glanced at the deed. "It is a simple business matter and must be dealt with in that way. Now I suggest that you produce the certificates bearing the numbers corresponding to those set down in the deed. I suppose you have them with you?"

Lowell, who seemed on the *verge* of a tantrum, thrust forward his neck and glared from one to the other until the silence oppressed even Doctor Lowell.

"Well, what are you going to do?" she inquired sharply.

"There is no law in the land that will compel me to produce those certificates," he squealed. "I have had the best legal—" He stopped abruptly.

"Oh," sneered his wife, "you deemed it best to fortify yourself on that nice legal point."

"Nothing of the sort! I am perfectly willing to present those certificates for your consideration, but I shan't be bullied into it."

At the moment Trent broke into the colloquy.

"He can't possibly show that he has kept that interest intact, Doctor Lowell," he said, "because he has sold four shares to James Oliphant, of the Excelsior Mining Company."

As Lowell glanced at Trent his demeanor changed; he opened his mouth to speak, but words failed to come. He turned suddenly, mopping his face, and sat down. Trent walked to Doctor Lowell and handed her an affidavit which he had secured in Denver.

"I ask you to examine this," he said.

Doctor Lowell glanced at the document, read it more carefully, and then turned her eyes to the deed of trust. At length her gaze fell upon her husband, and she shook her head sadly.

"Caleb, I've been disillusioned concerning you many times in the course of our years together, but I hardly thought this of you, Mr. Doolittle," she added, glancing at the lawyer, "if you will step here."

She handed him the various papers, and stood aside waiting.

At length the lawyer looked up.

"Doctor Lowell," he said, "I seem to follow you except in one point. Were those four shares sold before Robert Pinkham was married?"

Doctor Lowell turned to the affidavit.

"They were sold on September 16th, as you see, some two weeks before the date of the marriage," she said simply. "Under the terms of this deed, my husband has no more right to a single share of this stock than I have. And James Oliphant's holdings are voided."

Mr. Doolittle bowed rather unctuously.

"So far as I'm concerned," he said judicially, "I seem to coincide with Doctor Lowell."

"Bah!" Caleb Lowell sprang to his feet and stood livid, darting his head from one to another of the group. "I wish to say this: By the sheerest technicality, I appear to have been defrauded out of what is rightfully mine! I wish to say to you, Julia Lowell," stretching a long finger toward her, "that if you think I have been crooked in this matter—" A quaver came into his voice, but he cleared his throat and went on. "I had every reason to believe, when I sold those shares, that Robert Pinkham never intended to carry out the terms of the deed, and so in good faith I sold them to an agent of the Excelsior. I—am not a crook."

His voice broke, and his wife nodded at him and raised her hand.

"No, Caleb," she said gently, "I don't think you are. If so, I should not tolerate you around me for a moment. You were merely trying to be what you've always tried to be—too smart. This is one of the several occasions when you overreached yourself."

Caleb Lowell, for the first time in his life, attained a posture of real dignity and thus, with head bowed, stalked out to the door and departed. His lawyer, glancing after him, arose, and with hat pressed upon his stomach, bowed to the several occupants of the room; then he, too, took his departure. As the door closed, Miss Judson advanced upon her sister.

"Julia, I am proud of you!"

Trent stood back in mock ecstasy.

"Doctor Lowell," he cried, "if you ever run for President of the United States, you will have one vote—mine!" He made a low obeisance.

Doctor Lowell was smiling in some embarrassment, the first time any of them had ever seen her do so.

"Yes, yes," she said, "naturally I had to see that justice was done to Eleanor.

Come, Matilda, we'll leave Eleanor and Robert to clear up things—and eventually—*eventually*—I shall expect you both home for dinner."

"Home!" laughed Eleanor. "Did you say 'home' to me?"

"Yes," declared her aunt, "home to you always—even—even—" She paused. "Eleanor," she resumed abruptly, "I want you to remember this: You made a mess of your business venture apparently." She regarded her niece curiously, as if wondering whether or not to continue with a thought she had in mind. "Some women, Eleanor, are made for business ventures—some are not. I think you are one of the latter. But," as Eleanor flushed, "I have an idea that you have it in you to make just as big and fine a success in another way—a successful wife."

"Aunt Julia!" Eleanor, blushing vividly, flung herself upon the doctor and hid her face on her shoulder.

"Well"—Doctor Lowell's fingers passed gently over the girl's shining hair—"I have taken another liberty. As Robert knows, I had a conference with his father this morning."

"Yes," laughed Trent, "and they parted with mutual respect. You should have heard father, Doctor—"

"Tut! Tut!" The doctor was actually blushing. "I've taken the liberty, Eleanor, of committing you to the sale of your stock to Horatio Trent for—Well, I'll let Robert tell you the figure. It will rather surprise you."

Before either Eleanor or Trent could find words, Doctor Lowell and her sister had walked to the door and were gone.

The girl turned to Trent, a vivid flush darkening her cheeks.

"Robert," she whispered, "what are you going to do?"

Without reply, he came close to her, and she watched him with eyes half closed, trembling. He took her hand.

"Come," he said. "I have a surprise for you. Get your things quickly, please."

Eleanor, without a question, dreamily obeyed, and Trent conducted her to the street, where a limousine was awaiting them. He assisted her in and followed. She sank back in the seat, waiting for the man beside her to speak, but he remained silent.

Soon—it seemed not more than a minute—the car stopped. The footman opened the door, and Eleanor, as she stepped out, was confronted by the iron fence that bounded the quaint, rambling Little Church Around the Corner, which they had so loved to pass in their walks. Inside, the ground was white with snow, and the little fountain which had sported and gurgled so musically in the golden autumn was a gleaming mass of crystal.

Eleanor faced Trent in a sudden panic.

"Robert—I haven't any clothes—haven't anything! Robert! You are utterly insane!"

But he led her on and she went with him, overborne, while he spoke assuringly:

"Eleanor, don't be frightened. You're going to Japan with me. I couldn't go alone. You can get the clothes you want in San Francisco. My father and mother are inside, and your Aunt Julia and Aunt Matilda, to say nothing of the parson."

She stopped short.

"Robert Trent! And you were as sure of me as all that!"

Trent laughed.

"No," he explained. "I was scared. But," he added fervently, "your Aunt Julia wasn't, and she answered for you. God bless her!"

He glanced swiftly toward the sidewalk, where the chauffeur and footman were looking discreetly the other way; then suddenly, as they neared the

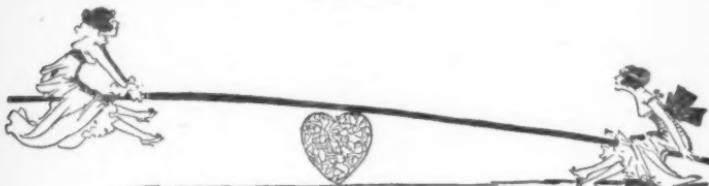
church door, he bent down and kissed her.

She glanced at him, laughing, blushing.

"It was frightfully overdue, Robert," she said.

The two were at the church door. Trent opened it, and they went in.

THE END.



WISHES

IF the Fates should give me three,
Let me see.
Would I be just nine again,
Riding bareback on old Ben,
Climbing trees and tearing frocks,
Tangling my curly locks,
Getting freckles on my nose,
Making game of sister's beaux,
Half a tomboy, half a vandal?
No—that game's not worth the candle.

Seventeen and lithe and slim,
Dreaming night and day of Him—
Handsomest among the fellows.
Every other girl was jealous,
Watching as we played the game,
Old, old sport of moth and flame—
No! That girl is buried deep
In love ashes. Let her sleep.

Would I grasp a deathless name?
Crown me with the wreath of fame,
Or with beauty's diadem?
Or below my garment's hem
Trail a jeweled Milky Way,
Stars by night and lamps by day,
Sign that life's unminted gold
Round me as an ocean rolled?

No! Instead a little earth,
Teeming so there is no dearth,
A friend, a fire, a goodly tree—
In these I sum my wishes three.

MARTHA McCULLOCH-WILLIAMS.



Broadmindedness

By Lucy Stone Terrill

Author of "Glow of Gold,"
"Orchids and Dandelions," etc.

EVERY one in Crowtown, even folks I never go to see at all, calls me "Grandma Weatherby"—except Mrs. Dunstan. *She* calls me "Mrs. Weatherby," and I must say I like it better than "grandma"—it makes you feel more like a real person and not just a relation. The Dunstans live on one side of me, and Alice and Alec on the other.

I always did say I'd never live with my children, so when John died, I moved into this little house next door to Alec, for he seems to understand me a little better than Jim or Frank, and Alice is an awful nice woman. She isn't so much for society as the other boys' wives, but Ellen Lane says she's more exclusive—and that's something, even if she doesn't get to go to so many parties.

It was Alice got me started to writing little things I happened to think about—not that I'm conceited enough to think I'm a real author, but just to keep me from getting so tired of rocking and rocking and rocking. Sometimes, when it used to seem as if there was nothing for me to do but keep on rocking till I died, I used to get out John's best suit and hang it on the hall rack—I sun it every Wednesday, and it hasn't got a moth hole in it—and I'd visit with it quite a spell. It got to be right helpful when I was real lonesome. I don't know whether Alice caught me at it or not, but one day she said to me:

"Mother dear"—Alice pretty near always says "dear" to me—"why don't

you get a tablet and write down little stories about people you've known? I really think you might publish some of them."

So that's how I come to be doing it. But I wouldn't have any one suspicion it for the world. Alice is going to put in the little quotation marks and commas and things; and she says just to pretend I'm talking, and she thinks I'll do real good.

Goodness knows, I *ought* to be able to tell things about Crowtown! I'm the oldest-timer here. Ellen Lane is just as old, even if she won't admit it, but she hasn't been in Crowtown so long. And, besides, she's every bit as broad-minded as any play actress that ever lived, so we don't see things much alike. And I can remember the time when Ellen Lane didn't countenance evil a bit more than I do. Sim Lane is so old, and has such bad rheumatism now, that of course it isn't natural for him to be flying around as wild as he used to, so Ellen can afford to say, like she's always doing:

"Don't be so critical and narrow-minded, Sarah. Lots of things that we, in our limited judgment, may not consider right really are of no value whatever in the great scheme of things."

I always come pretty near asking her if she's forgotten that chicken-pie supper at the city hall, but I never have. I can't feel it's just right to harrow up old heartaches just to prove your point. But, land sakes, I remember it like it was last week!

Ellen was treasurer of the Ladies' Aid, then, and we were giving a chicken-pie supper to help with the minister's salary. We had an awful good crowd, for all the U Cross cowboys were in town that day. There was a string of bronchos tied halfway down Main Street. I can see Ellen yet, standing by the door with her head bowed while the minister stood up at the head of the long table and said grace. Everything smelled of chicken gravy and baked beans and hot coffee. The cowboys could hardly wait for the minister to finish. He was a long pray-er. Most are.

All at once there was an awful commotion at the door, and the cowboys began laughing something awful; and Sim Lane came bolting in, swinging his revolver in one hand and pulling a Chinese woman, that none of us had ever set eyes on, after him by force. It makes me feel faint yet, when I think of Ellen's face. Of course this was all long before she'd got all her broad-minded notions, and it pretty near killed her. She dropped her pocketbook, and all the supper money rolled out on the floor. We never did find eighty-five cents of it.

"Oh, Sim!" she screamed in agony.

But he didn't even know her—his own wife. When Sim was drinking, he was a changed man entirely.

"Come on here, Buttercup!" he yelled to the woman. Poor thing, she was scared almost to death. She was the wife of the new Chinese cook at the U Cross Ranch. I guess Sim hadn't ever seen a real Chinese woman before. "Come on here!" he yelled. "You're a funny looker, all right, but you'll eat at this Sunday-school party or I'll shoot their blamed heads off!"

It was awful. Nobody dared hunt up the sheriff, for when Sim had been drinking, John used to say, he could shoot faster than twenty men, sober. Even the minister had to sit there—but

of course he didn't eat. Sim put his revolver on the table right beside Ellen's own dish of scalloped potatoes; and the way he waited on that Chinese woman, so gentle and considerate, was sickening. He never *was* very affectionate with Ellen.

There wasn't any coffee, for there was nobody to pour it. All of the women who were supposed to wait on table were out on the back steps bathing poor Ellen's head with wet dish towels. As I've said, Ellen wasn't so *tolerant* in those days. Why, I guess the Dunstans weren't even born then. The Dunstans are my neighbors, and they're the ones that started broad-mindedness here.

So the very night after the supper, we organized the Crowtown Society for Abolishing Vice, and we made Ellen the president. We worked right hard, but, as I recollect it, saloons are dreadful hard to abolish. And our church split into two parts, "on the rock of each other's morals," John said. John used wonderful language. Oh, sometimes I get awful lonesome for him!

Of course all this happened a long, long time ago, before we had very many churches and before anybody had ever heard of an open forum. Lots of people, even now, don't know about open forums. I wrote back East and asked my cousin in Indiana if *they* had one, but she said she hadn't even read about them. Alice says they have them in New York, but she says they're quite different from what this one is. Back there, I kind of gather, they hatch up schemes to kill rich men and railroad owners, and I must say our kind is better than that.

It was really the army people that got Crowtown started to being so broad-minded. We got a United States fort here, all unexpected, and then things began to change in Crowtown. Everybody dropped high five like a hot cake and began playing auction bridge;

the papers began doing a society column; the men got up a club where they shoot at little tin birds; and finally we got the open forum.

It seems the fort people didn't think we had lively enough ministers. One afternoon Alice gave a tea, and I always go to things that Alice gives. Mrs. Captain Flourish said:

"You certainly need a more up-to-date man. Why, *imagine* a man wasting a perfectly good Sunday morning talking about Jonah and the whale!"

And of course Martha Lane dragged in Europe. She's Sim and Ellen Lane's only daughter, and she *did* live in Europe two whole years, so now she stirs French words into her talk just like you stir raisins into cake batter. She said:

"*Vwalwaw!* But you can't wake these people up, Mrs. Flourish. I almost *perished* when I first returned from the Continent. Everything over there is so significant and—and *vital*."

From the way it looks now, with this dreadful war and everything, I take it they got a little *too* vital.

Then Mrs. Flourish said:

"Well, we fort people would be glad to help support any movement that would get a good, live man here to handle existing conditions."

That settled it. Crowntown had more new ministers in a year than you could shake a stick at. It got to the point where you felt more like you were passing judgment on an entry at the county fair than listening to the Scriptures, when you went to church. But it just seemed impossible to satisfy the army people's taste in ministers. Finally they decided to try a lecturer back East who didn't belong to any special church. His name was Baird Jennings Dunstan, and Mrs. Captain Flourish had heard him once in Chicago. So he came, and gave a trial lecture in the Commercial Club rooms, up over Jenks' pool room—and he's been here ever since.

Alice took me to hear him the first Sunday morning. There was a good congre—I mean crowd. It does beat all how men will go to anything rather than church. Mr. Dunstan just walked up in front and began talking, without any collection or prayers or music. It didn't seem much like Sunday, sitting there on dining-room chairs that belonged in the pool room downstairs. But I *did* get real interested in what he said.

He talked about "Common Sense." It sounded more like a lyceum topic—my, how John *could* debate at lyceum!—but he said it was the best religion on earth, if you seasoned it with kindness; and, goodness knows, he made it sound reasonable enough. But after I got home, there weren't any verses to look up, and I got all mixed up thinking it over.

Well, everybody thought he was just grand, so the next week they rented the Davis house and moved right here next door to me. I could reach into their south windows with my broomstick if I tried, so I guess I know as much about them as anybody in Crowntown; for, as I tell Alice, when you're just sitting and rocking by an open window, you don't have to listen to hear things.

Well, nobody thought Mrs. Dunstan was her husband's equal, because she was a quiet little thing about as big as a minute that never made herself conspicuous. She had brown hair and brown eyes and little brown freckles, and she wore brown dresses all the time. Every one said it was such a shame he had married that kind of a wife. One day Martha Lane brought Alice and me home in her electric, and she said:

"Every time I look at her, I expect to hear her begin chirping. Doesn't she remind you of a little wren more than anything you ever saw?"

Alice smiled a little—her slow, thinking kind of a smile.

"Why, no," she said. "I think perhaps she would remind me more of a brown thrush. Her voice is perfectly exquisite, and when she *does* talk, it's always a pleasure to hear her."

Martha didn't say *anything* more. Her own voice is a little like a fire whistle, and then people don't argue with Alice, somehow or other.

But it wasn't very long before Martha changed her tune and was flying around with Mrs. Dunstan every blessed minute. It seemed to me that every time I sat down by the window to rock, I heard her over there talking, 'most always to Mr. Dunstan, for when he was around, his wife hardly ever said anything. And wherever you went, you heard Martha standing up for Mrs. Dunstan. One morning after his lecture, I was waiting for Alice to come downstairs, and Mrs. Captain Flourish said to Martha:

"What in the world do you see in her, Martha? She bores me to extinction," and Martha told her:

"Why, she has an exquisite personality—like some modest little flower that you have to search to find."

Mrs. Flourish said:

"Humph! I must say she doesn't impress *me* that way, and I think it's a burning shame for a man of his insight and clear convictions to be burdened with such a little bug of a wife."

"Well," Martha said, "it might seem that he needs a comrade of deeper understanding, but she probably gives him help in ways we don't understand."

She was still talking when Alice came for me, and Alice simply *won't* listen to anything, and you have to admire her for it, even if it *is* aggravating sometimes.

On the way home, I said to her, carelessly:

"Alice, do you think it's *Mrs.* Dunstan that Martha's so terrible interested in?" Alice just gave me one of her slow smiles.

"Now, little funny mother," she said, "do you think that's a very good way to begin practicing the 'tolerance' we've just heard such a splendid lecture about?"

Of course I had to admit that it wasn't, and Mr. Dunstan *had* given a splendid talk that morning about hunting up folks' good qualities instead of their faults. He certainly was a wonderful talker. And handsome! Why, it doesn't seem hardly right for anybody to be so handsome. And the men liked him just as well as the women, for I don't think he ever mentioned hell or told anybody they'd go there if they didn't repent. But for that matter, he didn't mention heaven, either. He just kept talking about kindness and charity and tolerance, and minding one's own affairs, and not judging your neighbors, and common sense, and ordinary, everyday things that you wouldn't think could be the least bit interesting. But they were. Why, it got so you could tell an open-forum woman as far as you could hear her, by the nice things she said about people that you knew she didn't like.

It wasn't long before Mr. Dunstan was the president of pretty nearly every club and society in town, and the open forum got so much money that they built a queer-looking building without any bell tower, to hold their lectures in. The inside of it is right down elegant, and behind it is a newfangled playground for poor children, with all kinds of contraptions in it.

Mr. Dunstan wasn't hardly ever home a minute, and I could tell that lots of times she was real lonesome, but she never said anything.

One afternoon, when he'd gone out to play golf with Martha Lane and some other people, I saw her sitting writing away, up in what he called his "study" window, though it was precious little studying he ever did in it. So I called over and asked her to come down

and have a cup of tea with me. She came over through the back gate, in some kind of a little kimono thing and her hair all mussed up. I never did see her look prettier.

"I just needed some one to mother me," she said. "How did you know it?"

"Oh, I know lots more about you than you think I do," I told her.

"What *are* some of the things you know?" she asked, with a queer little laugh.

"Well," I said, rattling the teapot, unconcerned, "for one thing, I know you love that husband a lot more than's good for him."

"I wonder if I do," she said, low and thoughtfullike. "I rather trust your quaint philosophies, Mrs. Weatherby. Do you think a woman can do too much to help the man she loves?"

"I should say she can," I told her, solemn. "And there isn't any philosophy about it—it's the truth. You take an old woman's advice, honey. Men can't stand having too much done for them—it makes them uneasy and restless. They've got to feel a little abused to be right happy."

She laughed out loud, and she hardly ever does that. But she didn't seem to want to talk about it any longer, so I said:

"My, but you do write a lot of letters!"

She looked funny and got a little bit red.

"Baird has such loads of letters to write that I do all of them for him that I can."

"Yes," I said careless, "I don't hardly see when he gets time to write all his *lectures*."

And what do you suppose she said? She said:

"Oh, Mrs. Weatherby, how long *have* you had this dear little old spinet? It's *so* charming!"

And she walked over to it as if

she'd never seen it before. Well, right then I was *sure* about what I'd been suspicioning about those awful sensible-sounding lectures Mr. Dunstan had been giving, but I just told her I'd had the spinet forty-nine years come the twelfth of next September, and asked her if she wanted cream in her tea.

I tried to get back to talking about Mr. Dunstan again, for I wanted to find out, tactfullike, whether she was really so broad-minded that she liked to have him running around with Martha Lane all the time, but she stuck to spinets like glue, and pretty soon said she had to go home and finish her letters. But she didn't go back to the study window, and I looked through my pantry window that looks into their dining room and she was lying on the couch with her face all snuggled deep into the pillows.

That very night, he didn't come home to dinner; and at ten o'clock, he hadn't come yet. Well, I couldn't sleep to save my soul, so I sat up by the window to get a little air, for it was pretty hot, especially when you were all excited and nervous. It was a long time after midnight when I heard her go down and unlatch the screen door. I choked all up to hear her voice:

"Oh, Baird, where *have* you been, dear? I've been *so* worried!"

"You don't need to worry about me," he said, real hateful. "I should think you'd know that by this time."

"Y-es—but—but, Baird dear, when are you going to learn your lecture for to-morrow? It's after two."

"By Jove! It *is* to-morrow!" He changed his voice till it was pleasant and sheepish. "Get me some coffee, won't you? And read it over to me. What *is* the dope this week, anyhow?"

"New methods to meet changing conditions—the fallacy of clinging to old ideals in the face of new circumstances, don't you remember?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Did you go at it

easy, so as not to upset the old moss-backs *too* strenuously?"

"Why, Baird, I said what I thought was *true*. You surely think yourself that Crowtown needs these new measures, don't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so. I must say I haven't lost any sleep, pondering over it. How long is the blooming thing?"

"About the same as usual. Baird—I—I've been a little afraid lately that you're not really—"

"Oh, reserve your fears till to-morrow!" he interrupted her. "You're too serious for this world, Janet! It's cash we need—*cash!* And if you give these Crowtown sheep what they want, you'll be the wife of a senator next fall. Let's have some coffee. I'm dead tired."

They went into the kitchen and then upstairs to that study, where I could hear her reading and the both of them talking, but not loudly enough for me to catch the words. The whole thing was as plain as a pattern to me. After a while he began talking louder, and I could tell from his yawnly voice that he'd stood up and stretched:

"This is a rattling good talk, Janet. How do you ever get all this out of your little brown head?"

"Because it's true to me, Baird—what I *believe*." Oh, but her voice was tired! "Baird, did you—were you with Martha to-night?"

"I *didn't*, but I *was*," he laughed, like he was making fun of her. "What's the matter—getting jealous?"

"I don't just know whether I am or not." She was the honestest little soul that ever lived on earth. "I know you wouldn't do anything wrong, Baird." I could tell from her voice that she didn't know anything of the kind.

"Wrong? Well, you *must* be upset, Janet! *Lord*, I'd like a little of the Lane money, though!"

I guess he would have, too. He sounded just like a youngster hankering for a toy.

"You'll have money some day, dear. Try not to think of it so much," she told him, like she was his mother, humoring him. "Now see if you can't go right to sleep."

"You're a good sort, Janet," I heard him say. "Come over here and kiss me."

Then I guess he kissed her, for she said, trembly and sweet as anything:

"Oh, Baird, *do* you love me, dear?"

And I couldn't hear what the great heathen said. Well, I went to bed and cried myself almost sick to think she couldn't have had a husband like John, who was home every night of his life unless he went to a respectable lodge meeting. But I made up my mind I was certainly going to take a hand in all this broad-mindedness that was flying around.

That very Sunday afternoon, who should take it into her head to come and see me but Ellen Lane, and you wouldn't believe how she actually put on airs about Martha and Mr. Dunstan being so congenial and everything.

"You see he and Martha are such mental incentives to one another. Martha has so missed the contact with big, modern minds since she came back to Crowtown."

I right out and said:

"Well, goodness knows, he *ought* to be nice to her, the way she donates your money for all his schemes and societies! But I think it'd look just as well if Mrs. Dunstan always went along when they go places."

I could see Ellen was real fussed, but she just said:

"Oh, Sarah, how much happier you'd be if you could only look at things in a broad way—and tolerantly! You're too narrow-minded for this generation."

I didn't argue with her, but I *did* tell her what I thought; so she didn't stay long.

Well, I'd decided to think things over for a week or two and then act cautious

and careful, but that night things happened that capped the climax. Martha Lane had come home with Mr. and Mrs. Dunstan, and after a little bit, Mrs. Dunstan came running over to borrow some sugar, and we went into the pantry to get it. Just as I'd filled her sugar bowl, something made us both look up through that little narrow window at the same time. And there, right in their dining room, with the curtains up and everything, stood Martha Lane and Mr. Dunstan with their arms around each other—and he kissed her. It wasn't a short little friendly kiss, either.

I couldn't move—I never at any funeral felt as shivery and queer as I did right there in my own pantry—and that blessed little woman looked for all the world like a deer I once saw John shoot, before it seemed to know for certain it was killed. I *prayed* to say something, but I couldn't.

"Oh—oh—oh!" she whispered, every time a little lower and sicker sounding. Then she came close up to me and put her hands back of my shoulders.

"Promise me you'll never tell! *Promise me!*"

"Yes," I said as loud as I could, and then I couldn't hear it.

"As God in heaven is hearing you?"

"Yes," I said again.

She started to go, but she turned around and took hold of me again.

"If you *did* love Mr. Weatherby the way people say you did—oh, I *pray* you try—try and help *me* a little!"

My goodness, I just put my arms around her and told her to never mind, and that of course it didn't amount to anything, and that my own husband had kissed Martha's mother, Ellen, lots of times. I only hope John will forgive me. He never *did* like Ellen very well, anyhow, but I scarcely knew what I *was* saying, and it seemed to comfort her.

"Of course it's nothing," she said, spilling the sugar all over the floor, but trying to talk careless and natural. And then she put her arm around me again and clung to me for a minute and turned and ran home.

I certainly spent a pretty bad night, and the next morning I couldn't do a mite of work. I just sat and waited for Mrs. Dunstan to go out to the street car and go down for her Monday's marketing. We've got three street cars in Crowtown now—one goes by every twenty minutes.

Finally she left—dear little soul—and I went right out and called over the back fence:

"Oh, Mr. Dunstan! I want to see you a little while."

He came out looking right surprised; and he looked more so when I took him into my sitting room and shut all the windows and let him make all the cute little speeches he wanted to, before I said a word.

"Sit down," I said, and he did—on the spinet stool.

Then I began to talk. I'm not author enough to tell how he looked and, anyway, his expressions changed so fast it wouldn't be worth while.

"You think I'm dreadful old-fashioned," I started in. "Well, I'm not so old-fashioned as you think for. If I *was*, I'd go to everybody in this town and tell them you're a hypocrite and a sneak, and that you don't believe a word you say, and that you let your little wife write all your lectures, and that all you want of Crowtown is to get made a senator, and that isn't *half* I know about you—"

He jumped off the stool and tried to look noble and wronged. He even managed a sickly laugh.

"What a *preposterous* tale, Grandma Weatherby! How on earth did you ever invent it? You don't suppose any one would believe such a story, do you?"

"I think maybe they might," I told him, casual. "You see I got it with my own ears and eyes, and I've lived in Crowtown a good long time, and nobody ever heard of me telling a lie yet. People may laugh about me a little, but you'd soon find out whether they'd *believe* me or not."

Then he tried getting mad.

"You're nothing but a long-eared, malicious, spying old woman!" he began to yell at me, but I just said, real quietlike:

"Now if you think that kind of thing is going to get you anywhere, just keep it up, and I'll telephone to my son Alec."

Well, he sort of wilted down on the stool again and rubbed his stomach as if it hurt him. He looked like a great big boy that was right down sick. He stared at the braided rug under my footstool till I thought there'd be a hole in it.

"You're a pretty shrewd old lady," he finally said, "and I must say I think the joke's on me."

Then he tried to laugh. But I spoke right out:

"You needn't have anything to say at all. I have the shivers every time I look at you, and it's worse when you talk. I asked you over here to make a bargain with you, and I mean every word I'm saying. Now, I haven't any objections to your being a senator, and I guess your speeches do considerable good—thanks to your little wife. They've got me so broad-minded I'm not judging my neighbors, and I'm hunting up their good qualities. What's more, I'm helping you to *grow* some."

I waited for him to say something, but he didn't seem to want to.

"Now you can go on your way rejoicing as far as I'm concerned, *on just two conditions*. You've got to stop your little affair with Martha Lane *right off!* You might get to liking her money so well, there's no telling *what* you'd do."

I didn't feel it was necessary to mention the kissing, for, as John always said, enough's enough—and I had it.

"That's *one* thing," I went on. "If you see her alone again one single time, I swear I'll end your *senatoring* ten minutes after I hear about it. Then the second thing is, you've got to be nicer to your little wife. I don't see how on earth she can help but detest you, but as long as she loves you the way she does, you've got to make her happier. You've got to take her places with you, and play tennis with her, and kiss her quite a good deal. And I'm going to see that you do it, too. When I'm over there or out in the yard and you hear me cough, you'll know that it's time for you to pet her some little way or kiss her. Now that's all. Do you want to do it or not? If you keep your word, *I'll* keep mine. I'm a pretty old woman, and I never broke my promise yet."

Well, would you believe, when he looked up at me, something in his face made me feel sort of kindly toward him, much as I didn't want to? He got up slowly, as if his legs ached, and threw back his shoulders, and kind of smiled. He didn't look a bit proud of himself, and he didn't beat around the bush like I thought he would.

"You win," he said, running his right hand up and down over the spinet keys. "I certainly am the devil of a bounder," whatever that is. And he went home right quick. He didn't even bang the door.

Well, I guess it was pretty hard for him for a few weeks, and I certainly know his dear little wife thought the world must be coming to an end, and Martha Lane, too, for that matter. The next afternoon, she drove up in her electric and jingled and jingled. I was sitting out on my front porch, and when he went down the walk to speak to her, I coughed about four times, so after a little, he called in to Mrs. Dunstan:

"Janet, oh, Janet! Come on and drive over with us to see about opening the free concert hall." -

They had to urge her a little bit, but I wish you could have seen her face when she came out—just as surprised and happy.

And then one day when I walked around to the side of the house, if he wasn't spading up a flower bed for her fall chrysanthemums, and they were chatting away as cheery as could be. But I couldn't resist a little cough. She looked over at me real concerned, and said:

"That's a nasty little cough you've had lately, Mrs. Weatherby."

Mr. Dunstan stopped and leaned on his spade handle, and honestly I thought the man would have hysterics. Finally she went over and shook his arm.

"Baird! For Heaven's sake—tell me what is the matter!"

He bent down, still laughing, and kissed her—twice.

"I was just thinking what a really good time I'm having, planting a flower

bed," he told her, and it seemed to satisfy her. My stars, if you love a man, you believe anything!

I must say it was wonderful the way she chirked up. People began to talk about how Mrs. Dunstan was improving. Her cheeks got red, and her voice got happy, and she just perked up like a vine when it climbs over a north fence into the sunshine.

And his lectures got better and better, and everybody began saying we'd have to send him to Congress next fall.

It took quite a spell, though, for him and me to act exactly natural, till one night, when we'd been visiting over the fence and she'd gone into the house, he put his hand over mine and said:

"You're the best friend I ever had—except *her*. Thank you. I'll just keep on trying to be good enough for her, and perhaps I'll be a real man yet."

So I think I did pretty well at being tolerant. But I'm still narrow-minded enough to wish that I could let Ellen Lane know, somehow or other, that I'm just as broad-minded as anybody.





One of the Despards

By Eleanor Ferris

Author of "Doris, the Interpreter,"
"Faith Unfaithful," etc.

PEOPLE could seldom tell them apart except when they were together, which Irish way of putting it provoked Elsie's wry little smile as she looked in her Great-grandmother Despard's mirror. But she had learned not to expect much of "people," even from her limited experience.

"They can usually see anything as plain as the nose on your face"—she jabbed her hatpin through her durable hat—"unless the face on your nose happens to be plainer," she added. "Then they are likely not to see either!"

In corroboration of which cynical conclusion, three persons whom she passed in the village on the way to get her mother's tonic made up said, "Good morning, Miss *Evelyn!*" with unction, though they might have said, "Miss Despard," she thought, and let it go at that.

Of course old acquaintances who had known them since childhood seldom confused the two Despard girls. Mr. Doremus now assured Elsie of his own perspicacity, as he filled the prescription for the hundred and sixth time:

"I al'ays know you ain't the librarian." This after a cautious glance at the clock. "She'd have to come after lib'ry hours, anyhow."

The one-not-the-librarian—for even this negative distinction Elsie strove to be grateful. Anything was better than

wholly merging one's identity, even in that of a beloved sister. For she had four years' juniority, her eyes were bluer and her forehead smoother; they were not so awfully alike, really. Moreover, she did not worry about things as Evelyn did, which was well, perhaps. Worry was useless, for the "things" in her case were rather fixed, obdurate facts that could only be faced and by no means be changed, at least if one did one's duty, which, of course, one did.

But if, in the way of one's duty and of philosophically tolerating those who never knew one apart, one came across a person refreshingly discriminating, a person like the lodger, who, from the first, not only discriminated, but discriminated in one's favor, then to herself Elsie admitted some gratification.

Perhaps, with the advent of the lodger, her luck had turned. For the having a lodger at all was rather an adventure, little as he could have imagined it from the demure aspect of Elsie, as she stood holding the door open for him that first evening when he bounded up the steps, the pucker of his whistle still on his lips, so abruptly had the great white door opened before him.

"It's only that my mother mustn't be disturbed. I feared you mightn't quite know the door——"

She shut it herself, noiselessly, while she looked up at the stalwart and smiling man.

"You feared I might slam the door, you mean, Miss Despard!" He spoke in a considerably lowered tone. "Jolly well you did, too, for a slam was surely coming to you. But now that I know, you can trust me. That door will shut like velvet every night."

And it did. A very nice person was John Norton. That he did not quite know how "nice" it behooved him to be, as the Despards' lodger, or the high incredibility of their having a lodger at all, was only to be expected, seeing that he was not native to the town, or even to New England; and the inviolate Despard gentility, the pride that had always held their hearth sacred to themselves and their few favored guests, could hardly be obvious to a newcomer.

That this violation by a stranger of the sanctuary of their ancestral home might not be suspected by their mother was a matter of infinite precaution to the devoted daughters, who were doing it, as they did everything, for her sake. That she might have sweet-breads, they had meatless days, long before such were the fashion; that she might rest undisturbed, they took turns going to bed with the chickens and sleeping in the little room next hers, in case of call. Moreover, that they might summon a doctor in emergency, they put in a telephone and determined to pay for it with a lodger, who seemed provided like the ram in the thicket, just to avert the sacrificial knife that was held over them in the shape of the telephone bill.

In the very mail with the bill had come a letter from an old school friend of their mother's, with whom a desultory interchange of notes, picture post cards, and small Christmas gifts had been maintained ever since the girls could remember. Mrs. Norton had

once spent the day with them, on the occasion of a relative's funeral that had brought her to Broadvale, and had urged them to visit her "any time," which vague hospitality had been as vaguely postponed till "some time" when they could be spared from home, which time never came.

This letter asked for the name, by return mail, of a possible hotel or boarding house where her son John could stay while engineering the new line of railway through Broadvale from the munitions plant up the valley. He could "mess" with the men, but a clean bed and a roof over his head he must have, if his mother were to sleep o' nights. In Broadvale the so-called hotel was distinctly impossible; the inn and several boarding houses were open only in summer, and this was the chill month of February. The girls put their heads together—they were not so much alike even so; it seemed as if almost any one ought to be able to tell which was which, Elsie thought rather resentfully, catching their reflection in the long mirror—but they could not immediately think of a house where a stranger could be or would be taken in.

Then, "Let's do it ourselves!" Elsie said quietly, realizing her temerity.

"We couldn't possibly." Evelyn spoke almost irritably, as refuting the obvious. "There's mother."

"That's why," said Elsie, and proceeded to argue: that it was the only way to get the telephone money; that mother would be awfully nervous if they had it taken out, though she couldn't bear to hear it tinkle, so it had to be downstairs; that Maggie was safe not to tell her, and there was no need of any one's else talking if they did have a lodger, the son of an old friend. These cogent reasons completely convinced Evelyn, but not for two days. Meanwhile, Elsie had been allowed to reply to the letter that she hoped to succeed in finding a private

family who could let Mr. Norton have a room, at least until the inn should open for the summer.

In answer to the note following Evelyn's capitulation—wrung from her by the unpaid telephone bill conspicuously placed in her dressing-table mirror by the insistent Elsie—came Mrs. Norton's grateful acceptance and a month-in-advance check. "Lest we regret," Evelyn observed astutely.

She forthwith paid the bill, thus burning her bridges, and the rest of the responsibility devolved on Elsie, for Evelyn's days were passed at the library, while Elsie simply filled in the chinks at home, usually in busy contentment, as she was not a restless person, or given to kicking against the pricks that could be ignored discreetly by walking without kicks, as a lady and a Despard should.

That she was both of these, the most casual acquaintance seemed to recognize; *that* seemed as plain as the nose on your face. The Despards had always been unmistakably of good family, with clear eyes, unobtrusive features, and of a certain indefinable general type, neither ugly nor yet beautiful, though the girls had pretty feet, which "ran in the family," and walked sedately in conservative shoes.

"So they don't do you any good," deplored Sue Thomson, who, perhaps, was the reason for Elsie's recent resentment at being forever taken for her sister. She had always known Sue—"off and on," as Sue put it. That is, they had been to a private school together till Sue had chosen to depart for boarding school at the ripe age of eleven. She had returned for vacations, when not visiting at house parties, from then until she had finished. But her violently fashionable clothes and her scorn of anything highbrow had prejudiced Mrs. Despard, who had always thought the Thomsons rather "ordinary" and not the kind a Despard

need "see anything of." But the passing years had toned Sue's violence of costume down to "very good form," or else the eye of the beholder had become inured to a crudity of coloring even for grandmothers' wearing, so that nothing now seemed extreme, and Elsie had come to look with respect, if not with envy, on Sue's way of "getting it over," as she put it.

No one would ever mistake Sue for any one else—she was Sue emphatically and inevitably, from the tilt of her hat to the trim and very modish shoes which made the best of her quite ordinary feet. Mrs. Despard was wont to admit the good looks of a certain pronounced type of the Thomson family, but their feet "gave them away," she said, even if they had dropped the p from their name the first time they went abroad. They had been "Thompson's Horse Specifics" when Mrs. Despard had come to Broadvale, before they had learned to mind their p's and q's, she had been heard to remark to Mrs. Norton, on the one occasion of that lady's spending the day with her old friend. That had been quite six years ago, when Elsie was just out of school and had not learned to wish, even to herself, that the Despards had gone in "less for refinement and more for pep"—but that, again, was Sue's way of putting it.

Sue had so expressed herself on Elsie's confession that it was nice to see somebody who knew them apart even when they were not together and when she came up behind her, too. This, with sudden impetuosity, Elsie blurted forth one day when Sue overtook her with a familiar hail on High Street. She had been away for months, Red Crossing, canteening, buzzing generally, she said, and the two looked each other over, frankly pleased to meet.

"You see," Elsie explained, "it's pleasant sometimes to be a certain person—not always one of two."

"Sounds like being married without the advantages," said Sue.

"It's being plainly inconspicuous or inconspicuously plain."

"No," Sue rejected this humble suggestion, "that's not it. It's not so much having looks as it is knowing how to put it over, believe me!"

And Elsie began to believe her as she noticed that Sue's hair would have been described as sandy if worn apologetically, but Sue accompanied it with a burned-orange sport suit, and one decided it to be Titian, orange-tawny, and highly paintable. Without interrupting their talk, Sue led Elsie to a green roadster purring at the curb. She speeded up a bit on the hill below the Valley Road, as Elsie resumed:

"It's not that I don't feel flattered at being taken for Evelyn. She's taller than I am and much more intellectual and—"

"Yes, you're that much to the good," Sue struck in, though that was not at all what Elsie had meant. "You must be *you*, not just one of the Despards—see? You have nice, refined, Despardish manners. You've worn your hair the same way ever since you put it up, and petticoats through thick and thin, now haven't you?" With a nod, Elsie owned the soft impeachment. "You wear ladylike colors—longish skirts in grays and browns, oh, Jud, yes!" pursued the sophisticated Sue, for they were nearing the old Despard house, set apart in its group of grave elms. "You go in for a Quakerish effect that only a raving, tearing beauty could look like anybody in! With your lightish-brown hair and pale skin, wearing those dun tones, you're a perfect example of protective coloring. Cut it out! What you need is effective, not protective, feathers. Try that and see what a fine bird you'll be. Oh, I know," in answer to Elsie's gesture of protest, "you don't want to look 'common.' Well, you couldn't if you tried. By the

same token, a snail looks refined, but he hasn't much pep, take him as a family."

Sue stopped the car at the wide white steps.

"By the way, knit up some wool, will you? I'll send it from town."

She did so immediately on her return to Red Cross work in New York, sending, besides gray and khaki wool for army knitting, a pound of a very brilliant blue.

"For a sweater for yourself," wrote Sue. "I didn't dare send watermelon pink. This is not to be exchanged for mouse or any other refined shade."

Elsie held it up to her face. It did bring out the color of her eyes. Without showing it to any one, she set it up for knitting, on the evenings when she sat downstairs, after sister had retired. The sweater was half knit by the time Elsie had decided that John Norton not only never mistook her for her sister, but that he was most gratifyingly discriminating in her favor by staying downstairs only on her night below. The alternate evenings, sister said, he would look in and say, "Good evening," and usually add, "Horrid weather," or, "Nasty wind. Think I'll turn in early. Good night, Miss Despard." Then he would betake him straightway up to the room farthest from the mother's door, which had been assigned him for that reason. He spoke rather somberly, Evelyn thought, for so young a man. She feared he was a pessimist or a materialist, his voice sounded so unexpectant.

"Probably he'd just come from some comic movies," was Elsie's unimaginative rejoinder, and Evelyn, who had once been misled into a Charlie Chaplin performance, agreed that there could be nothing sadder.

Elsie, almost with a sense of duplicity, said no more. Could she boast, even to her sister, that there was no vein of pessimism in the greeting, jolly,

though subdued because of the sleeping mother, when John Norton came in on her evenings? Perhaps she had encouraged him to a degree incompatible with the traditional reserve of the Despard ladies since Puritan days. There had been many spinsters among them, unplucked blossoms on the family tree, single by their own choice, so their portraits, daguerreotypes, and even tintypes seemed to assert. Their aloofness might have been patrician, but had it not repulsed instead of attracting. Elsie dared to ask herself. Sue, with her usual touch-and-go, had once voiced the matter:

"You Despards are terribly stand-offish, you know. You act as if you could do without anybody but a few desiccated old dames who knew your grandmothers. Of course it's nice to be nice to them, but why nicer to them than to anybody else? People aren't going to break their necks to find you if you're never around. Take a man now—"

"One seldom gets the chance to take one, in Broadvale," Elsie had interpolated.

"Listen and don't be side-stepping," Sue had persisted, with the evident desire to rescue her friend from the shackles of Despardism. "You ought to get on with a man. You're not too highbrow. They hate that! You're talkable, with an awfully nice smile." Elsie had purred with surprise, being unused to "praise to the face" in her own circle. "You're afraid of running after a man if you smile at him when you bow. My granny, how is a man to like you if he doesn't know you? I'm not asking you to smoke or to say 'damn.' That's not your style." Elsie had assented, with horror in her raised eyebrow. "But let me tell you that mid-Victorian haughty indifference is all piffle, and nowadays it *isn't done!*"

With which exhortation ringing in

her ears, Elsie had at least not discouraged John Norton. She owned it to herself without compunction on her nights upstairs, as she lay awake in the room next her mother's.

Evelyn had said, "Of course, when he comes in, I am always reading. He can see he's not expected to sit up and entertain me."

And Elsie had murmured, "Of course." Yet had she been immersed in reading when John Norton's vigorous step was heard and when he entered the lamplit room from the dimmer hall every other night? Far from it, she brazenly admitted to herself. She had *wanted* him to see that she was only knitting—"Knitting a bit of the sky?" he had remarked, with an approving eye on the vivid wool in her lap—and that she was quite ready to be talked to and to be interested. To such a making of advances had a Despard damsel descended. But the depths of her fall from grace were known only to herself; for sister would have been horrified, Sue was not at hand to observe, and as for John Norton, his casual good-fellowship would never mark the fine shades of what a Despard and a lady could or could not do. Elsie felt sure that he did not think her brazen and believed that it behooved her to be so, or at least what Evelyn would consider so, in order that he should think of her at all.

"If you don't present yourself with a little accent—or light and shade—people simply don't *see* you," had been another of Sue's bald statements.

Elsie was beginning to see the truth of that.

"One's plainness or monotony is like the ring that makes the wearer invisible, I suppose," she had suggested thoughtfully. "But it lets one slip along in others' lives unnoticed and so able to see people as they are. It has its advantages, being invisible. The prince

doesn't see you, but neither does the ogre."

"So no thrills coming to you either way. Not for me!" Sue had sniffed scornfully. "Me for the front row in the chorus—not the choir invisible for Susie."

Mindful of all this, Elsie had deliberately schemed—so she called it to herself, not blinking facts—that John Norton should at least see her, and apparently he *had* seen her and quite overlooked Evelyn, proving Sue's contention that a man sees what you show him and takes it at the face value you put on it.

Her book of wisdom Sue had quoted copiously for Elsie's benefit, surprising, however, a look of Despardish warning at the first hint of a slur on her mother's precepts. That invalidated, but dominant lady mother could do no wrong, and Sue had bolted to the topic of Red Cross possibilities for women abroad, which claimed her immediate interest.

"There's no demand for semi or untrained nurses," she had declared. "But I'm going to specialize on diet cooking. There's always cooking to be done, and I'll get in on that. This country is no place for me while the war lasts. All the men over there, what's the use of hanging round?"

That this particular man was not over there was merely temporary, Elsie learned that very first evening, when he asked if he might sit with her until a rather important message should call him to the telephone.

She showed him the telephone in the study—it had been the study since her grandfather, the bishop's, day—where one could be quite private for important messages. Then, resuming her big chair and her sky-blue knitting: "It must be very important—your work on the new road, isn't it?" obviously ready to hear all about it. "Will it increase the munitions output?"

So she drew him on to tell how he

would have gone to France two years ago, but this contract had been under way and they wouldn't let him off, the idea being that he couldn't do better work there. Two more months—Was that the telephone? No, only the little clock! Yes, in a couple of months, he'd be through, and then you couldn't see him for the dust on the way to the front—somewhere!

They talked, or he did, while she knitted and listened and commented occasionally in the glow of the friendly hickory log from the white old colonial fireplace, mercifully preserved through the Victorian age simply because Bishop Despard would not have a Baltimore heater, like his more progressive neighbors. For which queer notion, his granddaughter now blessed him. A fireplace was such a pleasant third party to a winter evening's chat. It made one unafraid of pauses. If only she had dared let the young man smoke! Shades of her Victorian grandmother, and finer shade of her mother, whose sensitive nostrils would have been recalled from the hinterland of dreams to dispatch Evelyn hotfoot on the scent of burglars! No, she could not suggest it, and John Norton had the restraint not to look the word "pipe," or even "cigarette." Till in the midst of a yarn, it really was the telephone, and Elsie, as he jumped to the summons, rolled her sky-blue wool into her gay brocade bag, a present from Sue also, and went to lock up the already locked kitchen, so that the important telephone message could be obviously not heard, even the one end of it that would be probably unintelligible to her untechnical ears, if it were a report to his chief of the day's work.

After that it became her custom to leave him to put out the lamp at his own time, for he confessed to a habit of burning the midnight, and she would slip away with a brief good night, on the sound of the peremptory ring which

came anywhere between nine and half past ten, when he was sure to get a clear wire, he said.

Elsie never saw him again till the next of her evenings downstairs, for in the morning he was up and off by seven. She could hear his car running quietly out of the barn across the road where he kept it at night. Often an early whiff of coffee told her that kind-hearted Maggie had insisted on his having a "warmin' cup against the mornin' chill;" but that was not in the bond and was a matter between himself and Maggie.

Then the morning and evening were the second day, as in the days of the creation, and Elsie would find herself with new eagerness anticipating the turn of the clock. For as long as she could remember, the winter evenings had been Cranfordlike in their monotony. The village society, consisting chiefly of elderly spinsters and childless widows, took its walks abroad and held its mild junkettings by daylight. The tired doctor and conscientiously sociable rector were thankful if nothing called them out, and the sound of a passing motor or horse usually meant a joy ride from a neighboring town or a trip to the movies by some of the more enterprising farmers up the valley.

Of course, in summer, the inn was alight at the turn of the road, and occasionally one went with a woman friend to hear the music, or to a charity benefit; but for dances and moonlit picnics the Despards did not "go in," having deferred to their mother's condemnation, unseen, of the new dances when they were new; also realizing that extra girls, with no return hospitality to proffer, were more than superfluous, despite the generous protests of Sue, who had continued to invite them as often as they declined. Evelyn had even implied that the certainty of their declining made safe the invitation, but

this Elsie loyally refuted; Sue was too kind for that.

The evidence of Sue's kindness tangibly took form in the sky-blue sweater, till the completed garment jauntily sat on Elsie's slim shoulders and dared Evelyn's strictures.

"Of course Sue *would* choose such a shade! You can't be seen in it, unless under a coat. It looks like a chorus lady," was her decree.

Since it was a gift, however, she agreed that it was needless to upset mother by showing it to her; so Elsie reserved it for the first warm evenings in April, when the open windows would make it advisable to slip on something if one had anything becoming to slip. For she found herself rather dressing for the part, or at least doing her hair for it. She tried various ways, from pictures in the ladies' magazines, and was not easily successful, having been wont to "fix" her hair, not to "do" it, as Sue had frankly told her. However, she did achieve a simple coiffure neatly with a net, which Evelyn censured as artificial looking and which her mother thought very "trying" and hoped she would not find it necessary to adopt permanently.

Mrs. Despard, having been a very pretty woman in her day, preserved an attitude of gentle toleration toward her daughters' lack of "looks." They were Despards, which must suffice. But any new fashions she usually distrusted for them, as "trying and not quite refined," which was discouraging and often deterring.

Once launched on this course of dressing with intent to attract, or of asserting her own individuality, as Elsie put it to herself, she strove to let herself go, to be at least as nice to a well-set-up young man as to any cut-and-dried old maid, as Sue reiterated in her one descent upon the village when, between trains, she reorganized the local war-relief branch and encountered El-

sie, who had stopped in for gauze to be made up at home. She could and did roll bandages by the hour in her mother's room, when she could not leave her to work at the parish house. Sue good-humoredly took her in, with appraisal in her eye.

"I like your hair," was her first comment; then, unexpectedly: "Get busy and practice on John Norton. It won't hurt him, and it'll do you a lot of good."

"Oh, he only tells me about his work sometimes in the evenings," was Elsie's discreet rejoinder.

"I bet he does," said Sue. "His work is wife and child to him. He'll tell you that, though he may not 'tell you apart!'" chuckled Sue, and Elsie did not think it necessary to dwell on his discrimination. She only reminded Sue that they had not told their mother of his lodging with them; to which Sue rejoined: "Oh, no! What's the use of worrying her?" which live-and-let-live policy had been hers since she had taken matters out of her parents' hands and gone to boarding school at eleven.

Her hands were certainly capable. She wound the Red Cross branch around her little finger, then flew back to diet cooking in town. Only in summer had Sue ever had much time to bestow on Broadvale, though her interest did not wane during her periods of absence, and the village found her ready to take them up just where she had left off, which is always a satisfaction.

In fact, it was this perennial interest of Sue's which alone had upheld her friendship with Elsie through years of very intermittent contact; for, with the Despards, one had always to go more than halfway, they were "that proud," as Sue expressed it.

And now that Elsie had determined to go at least halfway toward this pleasantly discriminating engineer, she stiffened her intent with the reflection that

her halfway would be but the starting point, if she were Sue.

So she wore the sky-blue sweater with a pretty white gown which she had shortened to display her blue silk stockings. The costume Evelyn thought rather too good for every day and seemed struck by the forcedly careless tone of Elsie's reply that the dress was two years old; if reserved for special occasions, it would outwear a lifetime in Broadvale society. And with the first warm evening, while the trees were still only budding and the crocuses brilliant promises of summer, Elsie sat on the white-pillared veranda knitting khaki wool when John Newton housed his car. He came quickly up the walk between the box hedges and made a radical suggestion:

"It's early. My telephone message won't come for an hour at least. Why not come for a turn with me? Let me run the car out again. It would do you good to get a bit of a change."

The Despard was about to refuse; the woman hesitated and—was lost.

"Why, yes," she said, "I'd love to—if you'll let me stop at the druggist's?"

So they walked together down the path and over the road for a glorious spin around the lake, which John cheerfully insisted was on the way to the druggist. It was all too short, yet Elsie could only snatch a fearful joy therefrom, knowing that the call at the pharmacy was an excuse, for the medicine would not be needed till to-morrow night. But she wished to be able to remark to Evelyn casually that Mr. Norton had kindly run her down to replenish it, if it should befall that Evelyn had come downstairs on any errand for her mother and found the house deserted. That would have a very different seeming from the bald going for a moonlight ride alone with a personable young man, which was not the way of the Despard ladies, though perhaps they never had had the chance, thought

the recalcitrant Elsie, boldly eating a maple-nut sundae while she waited with Norton for the pills!

The car raced along the moonlit ribbon of the road and they were back in three-quarters of an hour. In case the telephone message should come earlier than usual, John acquiesced in this punctuality.

He never mentioned his reason for bowing to the supreme importance of that telephonic summons, and Elsie deduced that his chief was one who expected every man to be on the job when the chief elected to signal.

His job was truly never far from his mind, she believed, even as Sue had said, with the astuteness of one who had known him "off and on since her first house party." Who had Sue not known off and on, with her genius for friendship, which Elsie had come to envy?

His job had taken him to all parts of the world, till his mother's stipulation for a clean bed and a roof seemed the merest affectation, he told Elsie, since no clean beds were to be had in most engineering camps save under the roof of stars.

"Roughing it is jolly," he said. "Yet it makes my present bunk all the jollier by contrast."

He was always courteously appreciative. Evelyn had told her that several times, on his prompt way upstairs, he had said from the hall: "It's cozy below, but my day's work makes my wonderful four-poster look good to me." Not that it seemed to attract so irresistibly on her own nights below, Elsie noted with inward satisfaction. She had become quite conscienceless with the spring weather, almost ready to bear with John's theory that morality is largely a matter of climate. The theory was not original, of course, but that a Despard should not refute it, with puritan horror and unimpeachable examples of righteous men who had

lived unscathed on the very equator, was a new and most reprehensible state of things.

Not only did Elsie tolerate the statement of John's theory unchallenged, but she leaned back as inviting to a long yarn, and bade him tell her "about them," evidently meaning these climatically irresponsible and immoral folk to whom his theory pertained.

So he spun yarns of Mexico, of South America, and of the islands of the sea, on that and on other evenings, till the telephone would soon or late bring him to with a start, and he would be in the study with the door shut before its first whirl had ceased.

To these yarns, Elsie would listen, forgetting to knit, a thrill, yet aghast. It was like reading Conrad, which always made her thankful to be leagues away from it all, safely "cabined, cribbed, confined"—in fact, no hackneyed quotation could too greatly emphasize the sense of walls and protection—from those menacing shapes which stalked through all tales of desert and jungle and tropical river, shapes of famine or sunstroke or stealthy, crawling, stinging things and sin and uncleanness. It did seem a matter of climate; for when the scene mounted upward, when the engineer's battle was with rock and avalanche and deathly cold, Elsie breathed a purer air with relief, not dreading the bite of the icy blast. That was a familiar nip to a New Englander. The mere telling of it seemed to fire John Newton. One saw that heat and cold, good and bad, the far places, the strange peoples called to him alike.

All the awayness and strangeness which repelled Elsie and made her hug tight the sense of at-homeness and security, even while she listened with fascination, lured him till his rugged face was alight with other fire than that from the hickory logs, and he would rise and pace the room, steering

among the colonial footstools and Hepelwhite chairs as if they were stumps in a woods clearing or hummocks in a swamp, till the telephone took him with a jump to the study. And Elsie, rolling up her knitting, would wish herself other than she was, a bolder, more dashing soul, a woman who would thrill to the call of the far places and be eager to fare forth with her man, to stand shoulder to shoulder facing the loneliness, the strange beasts, or the wilder, stranger, wickeder people, wherever the engineer might pitch his tent.

"My wife will have a lot to put up with," he said once, and she started as if he had read her thought. "She must love it, that's all," he finished the subject to his satisfaction.

"Perhaps she won't go with you," Elsie ventured.

"Then she won't be my wife." This with utter finality. "There she goes!" And he rushed to the telephone, which always was expected, yet always made Elsie jump in her chair.

That night Elsie had much to mull over, and she lay awake till dawn, threshing it out with that New England conscience of hers which Sue had long ago advised her to have removed. There was no blinking facts. She had set out to assert her own individuality, her vanity hurt by her insignificance in the eyes of her little world, and she had deliberately tried to attract this man, quite as unscrupulously as any courtesan might. Yet she was less honest, for she was not brave enough to follow up. Should he ask her to marry him, she would refuse, and her excuses would be futile in his sight, paltry and faint-hearted excuses that would reveal her to him for the silly little flirt she was. If there was an underlying feminine satisfaction in the thought that she had succeeded in attracting so much of a man, she smothered that feeling as the last touch of her ignobility.

On her next night downstairs, Elsie, with her hair fixed as she and Evelyn had worn it ever since they had put it up, with no sign of the sky-blue sweater about, Elsie in a gray dress sat reading with apparent absorption when John came in late and in quite a rush, though even then he remembered not to slam the door.

"Telephone hasn't rung yet?" he demanded, and seemed relieved at her quiet negative. "I was detained finishing up my job. It's really done! Telegraphed for an appointment to join the Russian engineering bunch and got it. So I'll soon be packing my old kit bag—if—"

He broke off and went to the fire, for those first warm evenings had been forgotten in the usual chill of the reluctant New England spring. He fussed over the logs till the fallen stub ends blazed. Elsie again took up her book.

"You must always have read a lot," he said. "I haven't, yet lately I've been writing—on the evenings when I've dashed upstairs—just sketches of some of my weird experiences—the snake audience I used to play to in the desert; the coolie who tried to poison me for a dollar watch—some of the yarns I've told you. I yawned till you yawned—oh, very politely of course, so I've never caught you at it—"

"No, I never wanted to." Elsie's shudders at his tales had not been soporific. "But why not write?" she pounced on the safe topic. "Stevenson was both, a bridge builder and a writer. Do you enjoy it? Do you get your inspiration as you write or—"

"Oh, I get my inspiration the nights I don't write—" He stopped as if he had said too much, and Elsie seized her book with a gasp of compunction. Had she too late returned to that way of garb and of hair which would make anybody look like nobody? Had she

experimented to blight his career, brought him to the point, with herself not only unwilling to meet him half-way, but side-stepping the whole issue?

The telephone rang. John bolted through the open door, and Elsie sped upstairs, her cheeks burning, her thoughts aghast. In her room she realized that she must face the music, at least to the extent of going back to say good-by. If his job were finished, he must be shown by her indifferent friendliness that it was the end of any hopes he might be cherishing. With a queer twist of feminine feeling, she put on the sky-blue sweater, then adjured herself to be a Despard. With small, thin hands nervously clenched, she went back through the passage and halfway downstairs; then stopped tensely. His voice came from below, his tone subdued, but vibrant:

"Are you still there, my darling?"

She faltered, drew back a little; her return had made him confident that he had only to speak. She drew back, but his ardor followed her:

"Dearest, must it be good night now? Then till to-morrow."

But she could not see him to-morrow. Better end it now! She leaned over the banister and saw him. He was speaking into the telephone, hanging up the receiver. He turned and glimpsed her as she started away.

"Oh, wait, Miss Despard!" He sprang to the stairs. "Did you hear? Sue wants you to know, if you don't

already. She's given in at last. We're engaged—at least Sue is. I've been always. But Sue wouldn't till we could go out there together. She wouldn't stand for going to France engaged to me here. It would have been slow for her. But now I'm fixed for Russia, she'll come, too. We'll be married before we sail. Isn't it bully?"

He held out an eager hand. She met it with a firm grasp.

"I am so glad," she managed to say.

"You've been awfully ripping to let me talk against time every other night waiting for her telephone. She'd only do it that often because we weren't really engaged. She said it was hard enough to get it in then. So I had to hang around——"

"Sh-h-h!" came reprovingly over the stairs, and Evelyn appeared with a worried frown and an ice bag. "Mother is awake. I left her door open. Good evening, Mr. Norton," she whispered politely. "Elsie, fill this, please," and, handing over the bag, she slipped away.

John Norton's eyes followed her and, astonished, returned to Elsie, who still stood above him on the stair.

"Well, I'll be——" He stopped and began, "Well, I never knew before there were *two* of you!"

Elsie took this, and if the woman quailed, the Despard rallied valiantly to the defense. She smiled.

"Really?" Her tone achieved the casual. "They say we are very much alike," and she went to break the ice.





Gregory's Mother

By Countess Barcynska

Author of "Love Maggy,"
"The Honey Pot," etc.

OTHER boys had mothers, but Gregory's mother was dead. Nurse said she was dead. She was not at home when she died. Gregory's father did not talk about her. His face was very sad. Gregory had no one to talk to about his mother. That is what made him start to write it all down when he was seven years old and could spell most words. She had died when he was three. He wanted to write about all he could remember of her, so that by the time he had grown into a man and had forgotten, he would only have to see what he had written to bring it all back to him.

Nurse said Gregory could not possibly remember his mother because he was too little to notice what she was like. But nurse, though kind, was only an ignorant woman. There were such lots of things she could not and never would understand. For one thing, she did not understand what a great deal little boys notice, especially when they have no one to play with and have been born thoughtful. Gregory must have been noticing his mother while people still held him in their arms.

She had been quite different from nurse. Nurse was not pretty. Nurse's hands were hard. The hands of Gregory's mother had been soft and beautiful—everything about her had been soft and beautiful. Her voice had been soft, like music playing gently with the soft pedal down. Her clothes had been soft. She had never worn anything scratchy.

Gregory's mother had had lots and lots and lots of dark hair. In the daytime, she had worn it loosely gathered into a kind of a bump at the back. At night, she had let it down each side of her head like curtains. It had used to fall over his face when she put him in his cot. When he was awake, he had liked to clutch it in his fingers.

In the mornings it had been her habit to take her little, tiny boy into her great, big bed. She would laugh and kiss him and cuddle him down in her arm. And he thought that made him go to sleep.

His mother had used to do such lots and lots and lots of things for him. She had had the trick of making him laugh more than any one else could. Her face had been always talking and changing, and her eyes had had such jokes in them.

She had had a hat. Gregory hadn't known it was a hat then. He had thought it was the sky, because it was all blue underneath in the part that he saw when he looked up.

Sometimes, when his gums had hurt and he would not take his late bottle at night, she had put the hat on specially to amuse him; and then, if he had looked at the blue brim, he had finished the bottle right up without noticing what he was doing. Nurse had used to laugh at mother then because she thought it funny to see a lady in a nightie gown and a hat.

Gregory's mother had had such lots and lots and lots of playful ways like these. He didn't think she could have

been very old. She had used to kiss him very often, and he had liked it because of the smell. He had thought his mother must be some kind of a big flower, because she smelled like one and had a beautiful color.

All these things he wrote down. He wrote them in a penny exercise book which he kept hidden in his play cupboard. He would not have liked nurse to find it or read it, because nurse did not like talking about his mother, and he did not think she would be pleased to know that he had written such lots about her.

There was something that puzzled Gregory very much. People who died were laid in graves, and those who had loved them and were left alive put flowers on those graves and went to see them. He didn't think his mother had a grave at all. Perhaps she had been different from other people and had gone in her body to heaven, instead of leaving it to be put in the ground.

One other thing puzzled him, and he wrote this down, too. He could not *feel* that his mother was dead. He did not feel that she was even very far away. Instead of her memory becoming more and more dim, the feeling of her immediate nearness grew stronger each day. And, besides, there were times when he could see her; not to touch—child as he was, Gregory knew that the vision was one which his own imagination conjured up and clothed and colored and that a touch would dissipate it.

When he was quite, quite alone, he would feel her come into the room where he was, and she would talk to him in that lovely, cooing voice of hers and run soft, scented fingers through his hair. He would talk to her, too, and tell her everything of importance that had happened to him since she had last been to see him.

Perhaps, if Gregory had been encouraged to talk about his mother, he

would not have thought about her so much in secret. But nurse could not be prevailed upon to discuss her at all. She didn't "hold with" encouraging morbid talk about dead people. Dead people, said she, did not come back. Which only serves to show again what an ignorant woman she was. Gregory was quite alive to her mental limitations.

Conversation on the subject with his father might have afforded him some outlet, but his father was such a rare visitor to the nursery that the shy rapture evoked by his presence precluded such intimate conversation. Gregory was very fond of his silent, grave eyed father, only he saw so little of him. He was nearly always shut up in the room with the lots and lots and lots of books. Gregory had been told that his father wrote beautiful romances. If that were so, he wondered why his face was always so sad.

When he emerged from his study to take notice of his little son, it was always with an air of wistful half apology, as if he would say:

"Surely you can't wish to see much of such an old fogey as I am?"

It was almost touching to see the two together, so shy, so polite, so anxious to be friends. The laughing-eyed, lovely woman Gregory remembered could have put them at their ease in a moment.

One day, when Gregory was on his stomach on the floor writing in his book, his father walked unexpectedly into the nursery. It was not the prescribed hour when he was usually expected. Gregory was not ashamed at being discovered writing in the book. The feeling was more like that which bigger boys experience when they are discovered saying their prayers.

Gregory shut up the book and hoped his father had not noticed. But of course his father had.

"Writing a story?" he inquired.

"Not quite a story," Gregory answered.

"What's it about?"

"A lady." Gregory blushed.

His father looked interested. It would have pleased him to think that his son showed leanings toward literature.

"Tell me," he invited. "Perhaps I can help."

"Oh, yes, you could help, daddy." Gregory's reply tumbled out eagerly. "Because it's about mummy."

And then there was an awkward silence, as if Gregory had said or done something wrong; only of course he hadn't. It couldn't be wrong to write or speak of his mother to his father. After a long time Gregory's father said:

"You'd better show me."

His voice sounded funny.

Gregory handed him the book.

"Some of it is what she was like and the rest is what I feel inside me." He spoke with some difficulty, and the tears were not far from his eyes.

If his father had only said: "All right, old chap. I understand," or something like that, it would have helped Gregory to wait more comfortably while the book was being read. But his father said nothing. He was frowning a little, "not crossly," but as if his head ached. He did not seem to miss a single word. When he had finished, he put his hand over his eyes as if they ached, too. And then he said:

"You must think about your mother a very great deal. Are you lonely?"

The loneliest people and the loneliest children are those who do not know just how lonely they are. Gregory was one of these. He was not conscious of any particular loneliness.

"No. I like to think about her," he answered with directness. "She was so pretty."

He put out his hand to take the book once more, but his father still held it.

"I think you've written quite enough," he said, not unkindly. "You've filled up nearly all the pages. May I have it? Then—I can remember about her, too."

"Would you really like it?"

"Really."

"Then you can keep it."

Gregory hesitated. The longed-for opportunity to open the one sacred subject had arrived. He took his courage in both hands.

"May I ask you about her?" he stammered. "Is she really, really quite dead?"

Gregory's father answered without looking at him:

"Quite dead."

"Then what makes me think she is so quite alive?"

The wistful puzzlement in Gregory's voice must have escaped his father. His voice was nearly cross.

"Because you think too much about her. I am afraid you *must* be lonely." He looked worried. "Would you like some one to play with?"

"Oh, yes! I would love a little sister."

Gregory's father smiled rather sadly. He pulled the small figure toward him with a bashful attempt at friendliness.

"I'm afraid that's impossible, my son. But—d'you think you could put up with me oftener? I dare say I could be rather good at games if you'd show me how. Shall we try?"

The timid overture was almost too much for Gregory. Hitherto, his father had been remote. The suggested intimacy took his breath away. To be friends—playmates with his father! Words would not come to him. It was his face that spoke.

His father stayed in the nursery much longer than usual, but the time seemed short enough.

That same night, when Gregory was

nearly asleep and waiting for his dream mother to come to him, some one opened the door softly. That disturbed him, because his mother always came in without the opening and shutting of a door. He stirred in his bed.

"Not asleep?" It was his father's voice.

"N-not quite." Surprise at this second unexpected visit banished sleep from Gregory's voice. "Did you want anything, daddy?"

"No. I only looked in. Good night, son."

Big hand found little hand and gripped it tight.

"Good night—daddy darling."

The next day, when his father came to the nursery, Gregory did not refer to the overnight visit. He was a little afraid it might turn out to be a dream. He had been so very sleepy.

But the next night he had proof that it had been no dream, for the same thing occurred again. This good-night visit of his father's became part of the ritual of the new chumship.

The deepening intimacy with his father filled a great gap in Gregory's life, but the heart of a child is nothing if not faithful. Even in the middle of a boisterous game he would suddenly remember his mother. Then it would be on the tip of his tongue to burst out with: "Oh, daddy, don't you wish she were here!" But he remembered in time that his father, like nurse, did not care to talk about his mother.

Very often now Gregory's father would invite him into the room full of books and make him free of the shelves. He was even allowed to sit at the big table, with the drawers down each side full of mysterious papers and the top covered with an immense expanse of pink blotting paper, pens, and black and red ink.

One day, therefore, when, in the act of getting into the large swing chair, he caught sight of his own penny ex-

ercise book protruding from an open drawer, without the slightest thought of doing anything wrong, he pulled it out. As he did so, a letter dropped from it. Gregory picked it up. He did not look at it curiously; little boys of tender years are not curious—about letters. But the writing was very thick and inky, and so large and legible that certain words stood out and forced themselves upon his notice:

—for the child's sake, let me come back.
Your heartbroken wife, ADELE.

Gregory's heart stood still. "Heart-broken"—"wife"—"Adele!" Adele had been his mother's name. He knew that much. For a moment, he literally could not move. Then his breath began to come quick and fast. He heard drums beating in his ears. A sickening mist rose before his eyes. The mist was a nuisance because he wanted to see more before his father should turn around. Somehow he knew that he was not meant to see the letter, and that if his father found him with it, he would take it away. He knew now that his own feelings had been right, and that his mother was not really dead at all, but that they—his father and nurse—had told him so for some unknown reason of their own. He could not put it into words, but he felt tricked, deluded, swindled. They had told him a lie. They had taught him that to lie was wrong, but they had lied to him! His mother was not dead. She was alive! She wanted him—her little boy. That must have been why he had wanted her, too.

"For the child's sake, let me come back."

And his father had not let her come back; otherwise she would have been here with them now. But Gregory could go to her. Wherever she was, he could go to her.

But where was she? Perhaps the letter would tell him. For the first time in his life, he practiced a wilful deceit.

He crammed the letter into the loose pouch of his shirt and made for the door.

His father turned.

"What? Going already?"

Gregory flushed to the roots of his hair.

"There's—there's something I left upstairs," he explained lamely. "I'll come back soon."

He found the nursery deserted. Nurse knew he was with his father and, not expecting her charge back so soon, would probably remain in the kitchen until later. Gregory had the room to himself. Trembling with excitement, he brought out the letter and spelled it through laboriously word for word. A great deal of it he did not understand. It was very puzzling. His mother was sorry. She kept on saying so. She said she had not thought that Gregory would be taken from her. An older person would have seen that the letter had been written under great stress of emotion. Gregory only saw that he was wanted, wanted terribly.

There was no pencil in the room to copy out the address with. He had to memorize it. Fortunately it was short—Briar Cottage, Frensham. He said it over and over.

When he was quite sure he could not possibly forget it, he went downstairs again to his father. His father was ready to play games. But somehow the games hung fire that afternoon. The boy was so quiet. Gregory's father thought he was not well and spoke to nurse about it afterward, so that the good woman was induced to revert to her panacea for all nursery ills. Gregory always disliked his own name because of the horrible powder that also bore it.

He was asleep that night when his father came to look at him. He spoke to him, but Gregory answered out of his dream:

"I'm coming ever so soon. Oh, mummy!"

Gregory's father stood very stiff and still in the semi-darkness, watching the dimly outlined form of his little son and thinking of his son's mother.

Bonneted, breathless, Gregory's nurse burst into "the master's" presence, invading the sacrosanct library at an hour when none, not even Gregory, might disturb him. He had been busy writing. Perhaps he had even forgotten that he had a little boy, for he turned with an abstracted frown at nurse's cyclonic entrance.

"Oh, sir!" she burst out. "Master Gregory's gone! He's nowhere to be found! It was my afternoon out, and Jane promised to have tea with him. But he sent her out to fetch something, and when she came back, he wasn't there. We've searched high and low, and here's a note that was on the table." She began to sob distractedly.

"Be quiet," said Gregory's father. He opened the note and read it slowly, laboriously, as slowly and laboriously as Gregory had read the letter of his mother.

DEAR FATHER: She is alive. It was in her letter. I saw it by accident. I lov you very much espeshally since we played games it was so jolly. I have gon to Briar Cottage, Frensham with the mony in my box. Your lovin son
GREGORY.

Gregory's father folded up the note carefully and put it in his pocket. His face was quite inexpressive, whatever his feelings might be.

"It is quite all right," he said calmly. "Master Gregory will be back soon. He is not very far away. Order the car round at once. No, it's not your fault, and I'm not angry. You can go. Please have some supper ready for him when he comes back. And—there is no need to be angry with him."

In spite of her fright, nurse was too wise a woman to ask questions of a

man like Gregory's father. She calmed down at once, went away and did as she was told.

Three-quarters of an hour later, just as Gregory's father's car was nearing the outskirts of Frensham village, a weary little boy trudged manfully down a very long lane. This long lane, so a friendly porter informed him, had a turning which would lead him straight to Briar Cottage. It *was* a long lane. And he was so very tired. Frensham was not very far, in actual miles, from Gregory's home, but the railway journey had included two changes and one long wait. It had been a huge undertaking. But the biggest adventure was yet to come.

It was true enough—the long lane had a turning, and there was the cottage, a little tucked-away, nestling cottage with an uneven path leading up to the front door.

Gregory walked up to it and knocked.

A lady opened it. Of course it was his mother. There she stood, just as he remembered her, every bit as lovely and as sweet and wonderful. Four years do not make much difference in the appearance of a young and pretty woman, but in four years a child can grow out of recognition. For one unenlightened moment Gregory's mother saw a dusky and rather pathetic-looking little boy, obviously very, very tired.

"What is it, little man?" she began.

And then the words strangled in her throat. She gave a great sob, flung her arms about him, and dragged him in, laughing and crying. She gathered him to her. The tears streamed down her cheeks.

Perhaps for two minutes she held him thus in a transport, but she took no

count of time. Then she dried her eyes. Here he was—her child, her baby boy! He had come to her—miraculously! Presently she would hear how. Meanwhile, he must be fed. Yes, he was hungry. He had left before tea. No, daddy didn't know. But he had left a letter. Yes, a lovely egg laid by her very own hen would be lovely. And would she take him to bed with her tonight? He was never going to leave her any more.

Gregory's father arrived after Gregory had finished his supper. He had fallen asleep in his mother's arms, dead asleep, and she was asleep, too. Gregory's father found them like that. He looked at Gregory's mother much longer than he did at Gregory. He looked and looked, and then, if the room had not been quite so dark, one would have seen that his face had become quite soft and gentle. He touched her hand.

Waking up in the morning, Gregory wondered where he was. Some one had put him to bed. He was in a new room—such a pretty cottage room. And there was his mother bending over him with a breakfast tray in her hands. She had on a big hat, and actually—yes, it actually had a blue brim!

But he was still deadly drowsy. He rubbed his eyes, expecting every moment that the ravishing dream would vanish and that the room would fade and he would wake up really and properly to find nurse—only nurse. No, he didn't want to wake up.

A loved voice sounded in his ears, banishing sleep:

"Wake up, my son. *We're going home!*"





PLAYS AND PLAYERS

By

ALAN DALE

FTER all, it is the sweetly ingenuous and the archly tinsophisticated plays that make the most lasting appeal to the general public. It is impossible to get away from that occasionally discouraging fact. The public uses a saccharimeter, as it were, and patronizes the play that contains the largest amount of sugar. Playwrights racking their brains for novel ideas, unusual "twists," artistic developments, and intellectual fodder, must be satisfied with the dark-green folks who affect the "special matinée"—an institution that is exclusive, but not at all nourishing—for the "masses" will look askance at their endeavors and—stay away!

This is a very valuable thing to realize, and the hundreds of insouciant young things who write plays will do well to bear it carefully in mind. Moreover, the "sugar" plays are not at all difficult to perpetrate, and they are nearly all the same. They start with two assumptions: first, that to be happy, virtuous, wholesome, and influential, you must live in the country as far away from wicked cities as possible; and, second, that to be interesting, you must be gorgeously poverty-stricken and joyously improvident. These two assumptions are unerring. From them it is impossible to budge. And, after all, they are very simple.

The "heroine" likely to draw

"crowded houses" is not the proud young girl who appears in silks and satins at mother's receptions. She is the maiden in a sunbonnet who poses behind autumnal foliage and is usually found there by the city boy, who will eventually love her for all he is worth. The "heroine" who exudes the appeal is not the girl who talks epigrammatically and is regarded as "clever." She is the lass with the golden curls who uses double negatives as if they were the keys to all the virtues. And let me tell you that they are! In the saccharine plays, there is a dreadful prejudice against correct speech. The double negative and the plural pronoun used in connection with the singular verb are passports to charm and girlish appeal. In fact, it is looked upon as finicky and a trifle ceremonious to attach undue importance to questions of grammar. The popular "heroine" is happy in her rural home, a side view of which is invariably shown in order that one may see the ramblers, rambling as nothing roseate has ever rambled! In later acts, she is perceived in the wicked city, which she promptly hates. She is utterly wretched there, as she discovers the shams that always lurk where comfort resides and are never to be found in the frame cottage, with the impossible ramblers.

The reason that managers insist that she must know the city before the play

ends is purely a matter of the dressmaker. Oddly enough, the very people who make the sugary play possible are those who stickle emphatically for a view of fashionable clothes. I have heard of managers positively refusing plays that gave their characters no chance to dress for dinner in the last act. That, of course, is the one problem that playwrights are up against in the case of saccharine plays. There *must* be one act in which all the amiable peasants appear in Fifth Avenue toggery!

As for the "hero" in these plays, he may preferably be citified, so that the lovely country girl may show him the error of his ways. He can be affianced to some spectacular heiress, the perfidy of whom may be made clear before the inconclusive conclusion. As a matter of fact, the woman who is well dressed in every act of these plays is called the "adventuress." The women in the audience gasp a little at her clothes, but they are made to realize that these are merely the uniforms of infamy. Moreover, these clothes run in a carefully graduated manner. For instance, I have always noticed that the heiress in blue is frivolous, but not past redemption; in green, she is grasping and selfish; in yellow, she is not everything she should be; but it is in red that she is completely lost to all the finer feelings. In this brand of play, the "adventuress" in red will never be reclaimed. Of course you might have guessed that when you noticed that she smoked cigarettes. That is the badge of moral turpitude and irrevocable depravity.

Then there is the old woman with the "mother" touch. That is a character with a never-failing appeal and one absolutely simple to "create." I have known managers, hard as nails, with musical-comedy hearts, actually shed tears as they read manuscripts with mother in them. Mother always

wears an apron and is invariably making pies. She runs in from the porch to the interior from time to time, to see if the pies are not burning. Dear old soul! She always exclaims, "For the land's sakes!" and queries, "Wasn't you?" If there were a playwright daring enough to make her say, "Weren't you?" the stage manager, at rehearsal, would blight him scornfully. No public would stand for a pathetically dear old woman who said, "Weren't you?" It would be a case of "putting on airs."

In one act of these sugary plays, the quaint old soul goes to the city to see her rich son or daughter. She puts on her most elderly clothes—of course—and then the playwright writes a scene for her with the butler. He is very haughty to her when she applies for admission to the house. A party is going on, and the house is filled with nefarious people with "money." The poor old soul's son has so far forgotten all the principles of stage righteousness as to wear evening dress—*full* evening dress, too.

This act is always brimful of hearty and agreeable sobs, for no sooner does the rich son perceive his old mother than he is ashamed of her! This *never* fails to move an audience. If you analyze it, it is quite absurd, but of course you mustn't analyze it. It is a safe scene for any playwright to introduce, and if any of my readers have plays for the market without such a scene, I ask them to halt! With it, they are sure of an audience. It prejudices managers in their favor immediately.

No cynicism about it, if you please. Don't try to be "clever" or smart or funny—or anything. Just let the mother scene sink in, as it surely will sink, and avoid embellishment. Even the actors at rehearsal will swallow lumps as they approach this eventful episode. They know the scene by heart, but they love it, just as the audience does. It is not

the novelty that succeeds; it is the well-liked antiquity.

Then there is the child soon discovered by the saccharimeter. The dear little thing is extremely precocious and amusing. To make a stage child amusing, all that it is necessary to do is to ply him with speeches written for adults and to teach him to utter these complacently. This causes shrieks of happy laughter—perhaps the only laughter in the play, for sugar does not make for mirth. It is distinctly opposed to mirth. The play may be emphatically optimistic, but optimism on the stage does not mean laughter; on the contrary, it is the vehicle for tears. Pessimism may cause laughter, but optimism never! That would be a grave error.

Nearly all pecuniary successes are sugar plays, and those who write for the box office must positively realize that fact. Clever plays will attract ephemeral attention and probably secure critical commendation, but the public will not be enthusiastic. The clever plays may ultimately be published and sold for library use, but the public will not buy them. The public will dip its saccharimeter into the various offerings and select those that contain the largest amount of sugar.

The playwrights who rebel at this are merely knocking their precious heads against a stone wall—which is always a stupid thing to do. They must bow to the inevitable. Let them present the sugar plays for the public and give their choicest products to the “special matinées.” Critics go to special matinées—also to unspecial ones!

Take Miss Laurette Taylor’s play, “Happiness,” at the Criterion Theater. It was the very essence of simplicity. Some said—foolish chatteringers!—that it wasn’t a play at all; that it violated the canons of stage writing; and so on. It was a success. Miss Taylor, as the poor little Brooklyn girl, was deliciously winsome, and her scene in the rich

woman’s home was exquisite! In plays of this sort, all kinds of successful comedy can be evolved by a scene at table. The dear little “heroine” may be portrayed as racked by doubts as to which spoon to use with her soup, and perhaps—this is always lovely!—she may eat her pie with her knife!

As for “The Little Teacher,” at the Playhouse, nobody could see it and doubt for one moment as to its success. It has all the elements. There is dear little teacher at school, loved by all. How those children love her, and how cute they are! Even if the saccharimeter got out of order, it would detect unusual sugar in “The Little Teacher.” The story deals with the adoption of two poor little waifs by the little teacher, and her struggles to keep them from a perpetually evil father and mother. And later it is discovered that the evil mother isn’t the mother at all. And it all ends almost as happily as a play could end! With Miss Mary Ryan as the little teacher, and her suppressed emotion always to be enjoyed, no wonder that this play caught the public. Critics did not rave about it, but nobody expected that they would, and nobody cared whether they did or not. The plays that critics rave about are not invariably the plays that “go over.” The sated critic clamors for novelty, but the public doesn’t. The public wants sugar. Clever plays are built upon a sugar shortage; therefore, they are not particularly necessary.

Then there was “Seventeen,” which was as pretty as comedy could be, with its pictures of adolescence and its quaint ideas. This play was well acted and very neatly presented, but it would have succeeded with any cast and with any brand of production, for it has sugar—sugar—sugar!

At the Fulton Theater, who should burst upon our vision but the old “favorite” Chauncey Olcott. Olcott was always beloved of the saccharimeter.

Usually his plays were of the Irish quality, in which he appeared as a "broth of a boy" and flouted all the evildoers. Time was when he played almost exclusively at the downtown theaters. Critics did not worry about him, with the exception of yours truly, who always made it a point of witnessing his old new plays. This season, Chauncey Olcott was in the very thick of theater-dom, with a comedy by Rachel Crothers entitled "Once Upon a Time."

Critics were forced to see him, and of course they realized the simplicity and the "quaint appeal" of his play. This time, he was not the "broth of a boy." His scenes were laid in the Far West, but as a matter of fact, they differed very little from his former locations. Olcott invariably made his success—and he has been a tremendously successful star—by singing at some helpless child. With this child on his knee, he would burst into melody at the most unexpected moments, and perfectly irrelevantly. Things might be on the very verge of happening, and you might be sitting there patiently waiting for the plot to get busy, but suddenly Mr. Olcott would seize the little child, deposit it on his kneecap, and sing! Usually his songs dealt with an "Irish rose," or a "winsome colleen," or something easy of that ilk. It did not matter. It was all so sweet and so sugary and so "redolent of happiness" that the probabilities were never taken into account. In "Once Upon a Time," Mr. Olcott sang as charmingly as ever. The little child was taken into "wealthy" surroundings, and there was the expected scene with the opulent clothes.

The vogue of Mr. Olcott has always been excessive. No matter if critics ridiculed his plays and wrote humorous essays on their absurdity, the public patronized him, cherished him, and made him rich. Stars popular with the clever people, heavily salaried actors whose names appeared in all the public

prints, could never hope to vie with Chauncey Olcott so far as mere popularity went. It was the sugar!

It is the knowledge of the nourishing qualities of sugar that has enabled the managers of the film productions to wean so many people away from the theaters. In the pictures, there is never anything but sugar. A picture with an unhappy ending is unknown. The finale of *every* picture is two heads—a masculine and a feminine head—in that dulcet juxtaposition that denotes "living happily ever after." I have seen a particularly exciting play that ended unhappily screened, and do you know how the unhappy ending was rectified? The incidents were all there, and everything happened precisely as it did in the play, but at the very close, it was all seen to have been a dream! And they lived happily ever after!

Miss Jane Cowl produced in New York a play called "Lilac Time" that proved to be fairly successful at first, even though it ended in buckets of tears. Miss Cowl, who is a very sensible person, soon perceived what was wrong and changed the ending of her play. The play with the changed ending was not only a success at first when she took it to Chicago, but it broke all records, and was most phenomenally prosperous. A happy ending may be inartistic, but as a rule a long run is pleasing to the jaded nerves, and art—well, there is always the special matinée or the "cult" theater which proudly announces that it produces the plays that Broadway scorns. (I have noticed that the actors and actresses who scorn Broadway and hide themselves in the "cult" theaters return to the Great White Way at the first opportunity.)

All of which goes to show that it is by sugar that success is won. There is no other way. The sweetly ingenuous and the archly unsophisticated plays are those that "draw." If you choose to think that the plays that

draw have little merit and less originality, well, I cannot prevent your thoughts. The theater is as it is. There is no use shutting our eyes to the truth. It is the simple story, with a sob or two—or even three—in it, that appeals, while the smart, well-dressed, and cynical effort is relegated to the select few. The select few are very nice, of course—nobody will deny that—but I imagine that the average playwright will prefer the unselect many. The plays of Shaw and Lord Dunsany that this season has projected will be forgotten, while "The Little Teacher" will be making its fortune all through the land.

As I have said, it is not difficult to write a sweet little play. The rules for such work are perfectly easy to master. There need be no subtlety; there need be no literary ability; and there need be no masterful plot. It is for those who write plays to decide what brand they prefer. If they insist upon being "brilliant," they can be successful for a few weeks; if, on the other hand, they realize the absolutely remarkable effects of sugar, they can run for months, or even years.

The public yields the saccharimeter, and, after all, it is the public that the playwright seeks to allure. Isn't it?



PIERROT IS HAUNTED BY THE WRAITH OF PIERRETTE

I HAVE no means of knowing
Why love is like the wind
That never ceases blowing;
Or why the leaves are thinned.

I have no heart in wanting
Or finding any face,
Save one that goes on haunting
The ghostly garret place.

I have no doubt the creaking
That scares me is the sound
That Pierrette makes in seeking
What she—she never found.

Alas, the hosts of error
Besiege me everywhere,
And fill the nights with terror
Of Something *over there*.

And all my hope of teaching
The foolish to be wise
Is but the hope of reaching
The heaven of her eyes.

WILLIAM GRIFFITH.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

WE told you in the last number that "Kissed," by Arthur Somers Roche, was a typical AINSLEE novelette—a brilliantly written love comedy turning on a fascinating mystery. Well, here it is, heading the month's fiction features. You can judge for yourselves. We shall have missed a guess if we do not get a host of letters praising this story and asking for more like it.

Talking about letters from readers, they begin to pour in the moment May Edginton's name temporarily disappears from the table of contents. The best answer to the many inquiries regarding the date when a new serial by the author of "Magic Life" could be expected is the long installment of "Angels" in the present issue.

Alan Dale takes a gentle dig, in "Plays and Players," at the appetite for sugary drama evinced by the audiences of to-day. Even if you have a pronounced sweet tooth yourself, you will find his article most readable.



THE complete novelette in the August number will be by an old AINSLEE favorite, I. A. R. Wylie. It is called "The Masquerading Flyer," a title which in itself suggests this author's best vein. It is an up-to-the-minute story about a rich young self-made man who suspects every one of cultivating him on account of his money—every one except the girl he wants to marry, and she turns the tables on him by finding his millions an obstacle to their happiness. He has the choice of becoming poor once more or losing her. So he becomes poor. Or does he? The

mystery at this point is certain to pique the interest of the most jaded reader. At all events, the hero sets out to win fame and fortune anew, as the pilot of a transatlantic air plane. A big surprise develops in connection with his maiden flight. It is one of those rare situations in fiction which actually thrill. We know that when you have reached the last page, you will agree with us in feeling mighty glad that I. A. R. Wylie wrote this tale.



LEADING off the generous list of short stories for August will appear "Eyes," by Arthur Crabb. We plume ourselves on adding Mr. Crabb's name to the roll of contributors to AINSLEE's. He is a comparatively new writer, but has already earned a reputation in the pages of some of the biggest magazines in America. "Eyes" is a story in a thousand—clever, sophisticated, well written. You may not like the girl at first, but you will admit that emphatically she is a real human being and will want to find out where her coquetterie leads.

Robert W. Sneddon is another new name in AINSLEE's. He contributes "A Son of Belgium," a poignantly appealing story of the war.

In "Sally," Lucy Stone Terrill handles the theme of the neglected wife from a decidedly "different" angle.

The "super-woman" portrayed by Anice Terhune in August is Peggy Shippen, the evil, but beautiful, genius of Benedict Arnold. Her story is an absorbing page of early American history with which many readers are probably unfamiliar.

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W.T. Benda

“Down with the Kaiser!”

There has been rioting in Berlin. It is the first tremor of the earthquake that is to shake the Kaiser from his throne.

The Iron Fist descends to crush the revolutionists. Frieda Bernhard, a young German girl who is befriending an American captain during his imprisonment in Berlin, is suspected by the Kaiser's men. An under officer seeks her out.

“You are a revolutionist?” he snarls.

“I am a German!” Frieda retorts.

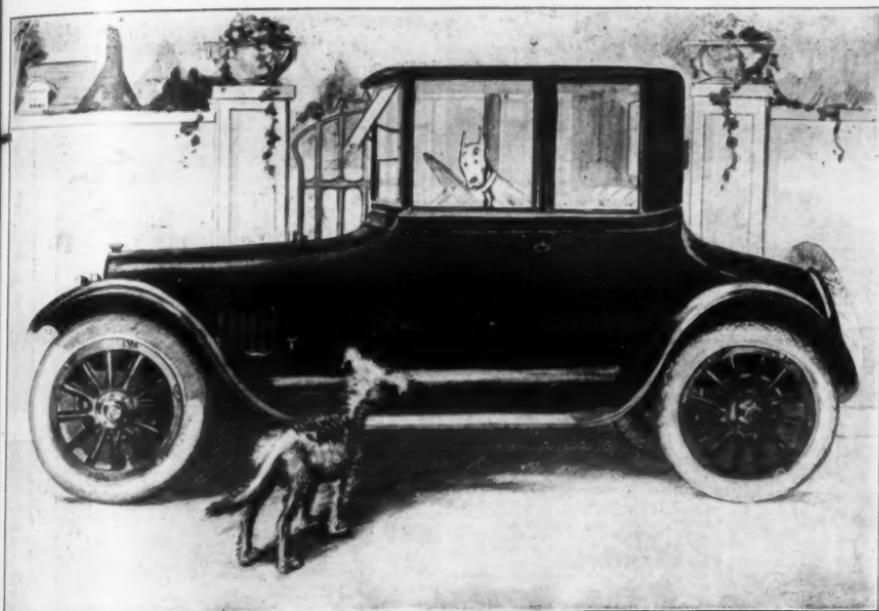
“You are a traitor! Repeat after me—*‘Wilhelm ueber Alles!’*”

Frieda pales. “I will not!” she cries. “We Germans have a new battle cry. It is—*‘Deutschland ueber Wilhelm!’*”

This is one of many dramatic episodes in the new McClure serial *“Licking the Huns!”* In this narrative H. C. WITWER has written a thrilling, well-founded prophecy of how the war will end in victory for the Allies. The whole country is reading it—you must read it too! Ask the nearest newsdealer for July McClure's.

Read *“Licking the Huns!”* in JULY

McCLURE'S



Copyright, 1918, by Judge

BOTH: "YOU LUCKY DOG!"

IT'S FUNNY how everyone of us wants what the other fellow has. The anemic man with a million, pines for the husky physique and care-free mind of the longshoreman; the chap with the digestion of an ostrich, an inadequate income and the biceps of a Hercules wants a satin-lined limousine, Russian caviar and a box at the opera. Why? Oh, Lordy, don't ask us. It's just human nature—the way we poor mortals are built. Human nature is a wonderful and complex thing, God bless it. We don't for a minute pretend that we understand the workings of the human mind—who does? But we spend our lives in putting into the pages of *Judge* what we think will appeal to intelligent people all over the United States, the kind of text and pictures that warm the heart, tickle the fancy or evoke a broad grin.

That *Judge* has achieved a large measure of success seems to indicate our labors have not been entirely in vain. The big thing about this publication is the fact that it's a bubbling, cheerful, stimulating friend; a friend who rides no hobbies, except happiness; who cherishes no enemies, except a supreme hatred for the Common Foe of Civilization—Militaristic Germany; who parades no fads and imposes no personal eccentricities; a breezy, rollicking comrade with a vein of tenderness, a sparkling wit and exhaustless "pep." This is the kind of a visitor one likes to have in one's house. These are the qualities which make *Judge* beloved of the nation.

The war? Yes, it is the banshee that dogs our heels, day and night. But why brood over war-time conditions? They are trying out our souls, have jolted us out of our self-complacency, and yet how much better off we are in this country than the people of any other nation on this

torn-up old globe. We are going to win the war—don't doubt that for a moment. And we are going to win it through American pluck and American stamina and our ability to fight, sacrifice and *smile*, all at the same time. The American soldier or sailor is no grouch. He sings no futile hymns of hate. The boys in the thick of it "over there" haven't forgotten how to laugh; the lads in our home camps and aboard ship are the merriest, fun-loving crowd of youngsters anywhere in the world. And they all read *Judge*—love it.

Recently the librarians at the various cantonments throughout the country took a vote among the soldier readers to ascertain what periodicals were most in demand. *Judge* stood right up at the top of the list. "Every copy received is read to a frazzle" writes one officer. Why? Because *Judge* is human, entertaining, enormously amusing. It is all American and nation wide in its sympathies.

Do you know that with one paltry little dollar you can wallop the willies completely out of existence? With a copy of *Judge* in your hand you can defy all the hordes of boredom and bury the blues so deep that they'll never return. Acquire "the smile that won't come off" by reading *Judge*—the happy medium.

A Giggle A Day Keeps Old Grouch Away

225 Fifth Avenue, New York City

All Right, Judge:

I accept your offer—three months for \$1.00. It is understood that you send me *Judge* beginning with the current issue, 13 numbers in all. I enclose \$1 (or) send me a bill at a later date. (Canadian \$1.25, foreign \$1.50.)

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

Ains. Mag.



Oh, You Skinny!

Why stay *thin* as a rail? You *don't* have to! And you *don't* have to go through life with a chest that the world *knows* is yours, and a pair of legs that the world *knows* you can hardly stand on. And what about that *stomach* that *flinches* every time you try a square meal? Are you a *pill-feeder*?

Do you expect Health and Strength in a bloated form—through pills, potions and other exploited pills?

You can do it, if it can't be done.

The only way to be well is to build up our body, all of it—through nature's methods—by purifying the stomach. It is not *fat* that is making you a failure; it's that poor, emaciated body of yours; your half-sickness shows plain in your face and the world *knows* it. The people *all* know it. That's *terrible*. Don't think too long; send 6 cents in stamps to cover mailing expenses of my book, "PRO-MOTION AND CONSERVATION OF HEALTH, STRENGTH AND MUSICAL ENERGY," written by the *strongest, fittest, and most attractive instructor in the world*, LIONEL STRONGFORT, *Physical and Health Specialist*, NEWARK, N. J.

Keeps Skin Smooth, Firm, Fresh — Youthful Looking



To dispel the tell-tale lines of age, lines of worry—to overcome the blemishes and improve facial contour—there is nothing quite so good as plain

Powdered SAXOLITE

Effective for wrinkles, crowfeet, enlarged pores, etc., because it "tightens" and tones the skin and strengthens the hair. Not harm to tenderest skin. Get an ounce package. Follow the simple directions—see what just one application will do. Sold at all drug stores.

YOUR NEWS DEALER

maintains his store at considerable expense. He must pay for help, rent and lighting. He carries many articles that you would never dream of ordering direct from manufacturers, and is, therefore, of great service when you need a newspaper, a cigar, or a box of stationery. Then why not give him all of your custom and so help make his business profitable? Tell him to show you samples of Ainslee's, Popular, Smith's, People's Favorite, Top-Notch, Detective Story and Picture-Play magazines. Select those you want and he will gladly deliver them to your residence regularly.

STREET & SMITH CORPORATION
Publishers
New York

Who will write the SONG-HIT OF THE WAR?

With this country entering its second year in the "World War" it is doubtful if the song which will be known as the "Hit of the War" will be as many as appears. While it is true that such War Songs as "Over There," "Liberator," "The Fighting Impression," have Our Boys adopted another "It's a Long Way To Tipperary," which has been the great favorite with the "English Tommies." Inasmuch as several Commanders of our training camps have requested boy in the service to write such a song it appears to be a worth while venture.

Have you an idea which you think might be used as the subject for a Patriotic or War Song? If so, you may secure some valuable information and assistance by writing for a Free Copy of our new booklet entitled "SONG WRITERS' MANUAL AND GUIDE." We receive some poems, compose and arrange music, secure copyright and facilitate free publication or outright sale. Poems submitted examined FREE.

KNICKERBOCKER STUDIOS 74 GAIETY BLDG., N. Y. C.

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

Be a Farmer!

15 CENTS

BACK-YARD GARDENING

Thomas R. Best



HAVE you a backyard, or vacant lot, now growing flowers, grass or weeds? If so, plant a vegetable garden and be independent. Last year there was a shortage in all crops and the demand was the greatest in history. That is why vegetables are now expensive luxuries.

BACK-YARD GARDENING

By Thomas R. Best, has been published to help avoid another shortage in the vegetable crop. It tells what can be done with a small plot of ground; how to lay it out and plant; what to plant early and how to secure a succession of crops—and thus get double service from the same ground in one season.

Price, Fifteen Cents

From your news dealer, or sent postpaid upon receipt of nine two-cent stamps by

Street & Smith Corporation
83 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK

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Nuxated Iron to Help Make Healthier Women and Stronger, Sturdier Men

Say These City Physicians—By Enriching the Blood and Creating Thousands of New Red Blood Cells It Increases the Strength and Endurance of Delicate, Nervous, Run-Down Folks in Two Weeks' Time in Many Instances.

SINCE the discovery of organic iron, Nuxated Iron or "Fer Nuxate," as the French call it, has taken the country by storm, it is conservatively estimated that over three million people annually are taking it in this country alone. Most astonishing results are reported from its use by both physicians and laymen.

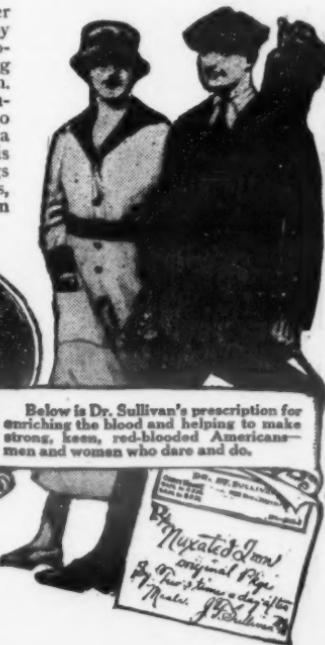
Dr. Ferdinand King, a New York Physician and Medical Author, when interviewed on this subject, said: "There can be no sturdy iron men without iron. Pallor means anaemia. Anaemia means iron deficiency. The skin of anaemic men and women is pale; the flesh flabby. The muscles lack tone; the brain fags and the memory fails and often they become weak, nervous, irritable, despondent and melancholy. When the iron goes from the blood of women, the roses go from their cheeks."

"Therefore, you should supply the iron deficiency in your food by using some form of organic iron, just as you would use salt when your food has not enough salt."

Dr. James Francis Sullivan, formerly Physician of Bellevue Hospital (Out-Door Dept.), New York, and the Westchester County Hospital, says: "In my talks to physicians I have strongly emphasized the great necessity of their making blood examinations of their weak, anaemic, run-down patients. Thousands of persons go on suffering year after year, doctoring themselves for all kinds of ills, when the real and true cause underlying their condition is simply a lack of sufficient iron in the red blood corpuscles to enable nature to transform the food they eat into brawn, muscle tissue and brain. But beware of the old forms of metallic iron which frequently do more harm than good."

"Notwithstanding all that has been said and written on this subject by physicians formerly connected with well known hospitals, thousands of people still insist in dosing themselves with metallic iron simply, I suppose, because it costs a few cents less. I strongly advise readers in all cases, to get a physician's prescription for organic iron—Nuxated Iron—or if you don't want to go to this trouble then purchase only Nuxated Iron in its original packages and see that this particular name (Nuxated Iron) appears on the package."

If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary Nuxated Iron three times per day after meals for two weeks. Then test your strength again and see how much you have



Below is Dr. Sullivan's prescription for enriching the blood and helping to make strong, keen, red-blooded Americans—men and women who dare and do.

gained. Numbers of nervous, run-down people who were ailing all the while have most astonishingly increased their strength and endurance simply by taking iron in the proper form.

MANUFACTURERS' NOTE: Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended by physicians, is not a secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach. The manufacturers guarantee successful and entirely satisfactory results to every purchaser or they will refund your money. It is dispensed by all good druggists and general stores.

IN THIS DAY AND AGE attention to your appearance is an absolute necessity if you expect to make the most out of life. Not only should you wish to appear an attractive person for your own self-satisfaction, which is alone well worth your efforts, but you will find the world in general judging you greatly, if not wholly, by your nose. Therefore it pays to "look your best" at all times. Permit no one to see you looking otherwise; it will injure your welfare. Use the nose correction which constantly make rests the failure or success of your life. Which is to be your ultimate desire? My "Nose-Perfection" "TRADON" Model #4 corrects now ill-shaped noses without operation, quickly, safely and permanently. It is pleasant and does not interfere with one's occupation, being worn at night.

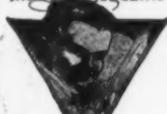
YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL FACE BUT YOUR NOSE?



Write today for free booklet, which tells you how to correct ill-shaped noses without cost if not satisfactory.
M. TRILETY, Face Specialist, 1029 Ackerman Bldg., Binghamton, N.Y.

The Boys' Magazine

The Boys' Magazine



EXCUSE ME
This is my Party Day

At a Big Discount!

In order to introduce THE BOYS' MAGAZINE to thousands of new readers, we will send this superb magazine

A Whole Year for Only 60 Cents!

(Regular yearly subscription price \$1.00, now stand price \$1.20.)

In addition to quoting this special low price we will give to each new subscriber a copy of our book "Fifty Ways for Boys to Earn Money." The valuable money making ideas contained in this book are worth a great deal to every live, ambitious boy.

Get this splendid magazine for your boy or for some boy in whom you take a special interest.

THE BOYS' MAGAZINE is one of a very few periodicals that have increased its subscription price, but not by raising our regular price. We are giving you an opportunity of subscribing for a whole year for only 60¢ and at the same time are giving you a really excellent premium in the book described above.

THE BOYS' MAGAZINE is chock-full of just the kind of reading you want your boy to have. Clean, inspiring stories by the best boys' authors. Beautifully illustrated throughout both in black and white and in colors. Practical and instructive articles devoted to Electricity, Chemistry, Mechanics, Athletics and Physical Training, Hunting, Trapping, Camping and Fishing, Photography, Drawing, Stamp and Coin Collecting, Poultry and Pets, Boys' Societies and Clubs, Joe Jolly's Joke Market, Cash Contests, etc., etc.

Send in your order today at this special price and make a certain boy mighty happy for a whole year. We are sure you will be immediately pleased with the magazine and the book. (Remember in stamps if more convenient.)

This offer is open to new subscribers only. Address, THE SCOTT F. REDFIELD CO., 2026 Main St., SMETHPORT, PA.

Shipped on Approval

Write at once for particulars of shipments and my 48-page catalog, Five-Pass., 34.7 H.P., 32x2½ tires. Agents wanted to drive and sell. 51.6-in. Wheelbase. Delco Ignition—Electric Stg. and Ldg. BUSH MOTOR COMPANY, Bush Temple, Chicago, Ill.

Let Cuticura Be Your Beauty Doctor

All druggists: Soap 25, Ointment 25 & 50, Talcum 25. Sample each free of "Cuticura, Dept. B, Boston."

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In War Time

AND ALL TIMES, EVERY WOMAN
NEEDS A GOOD COOK BOOK

The Complete Cook Book

By JENNIE DAY REES

Contains Seven Hundred and Fifty Recipes

Splendidly arranged so anyone can understand. The price places it within the reach of everyone.

15 CENTS

For sale by your news dealer; or if he cannot supply, add four cents and order direct from the publisher.

STREET & SMITH CORPORATION, New York

AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE

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DEAFNESS IS MISERY

I know because I was Deaf and had Head Noises for over 30 years. My invisible Anti-septic Ear Drums restored my hearing and stopped Head Noises, and will do it for you. They are Tiny Megaphones. Cannot be seen when worn. Easy to put in, easy to take out. Are "Unseen Comforts." Inexpensive. Write for booklet and my sworn statement of how I recovered my hearing. A. O. LEONARD
Suite 348, 70 5th Ave., N. Y. City

Swear Off Tobacco

Tobacco Habit Banished In 48 to 72 Hours

Immediate Results

Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take **Tobacco Redeemer** according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff—**Tobacco Redeemer** will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of **Tobacco Redeemer** treatment for the habit.

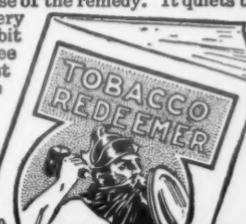
Results Absolutely Guaranteed

A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If **Tobacco Redeemer** fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address in a post card and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system and positive proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.



Free Book Coupon

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name.....

Street and No.

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The New SMITH'S at 20 Cents

WITH the next issue of SMITH'S, which will appear on the news stands July 5th, the price will be twenty cents a copy. Increased cost of paper, printing—everything, in fact, that goes into the making of a magazine makes the new price a necessity.

PERHAPS a more important change, however, will be in the character of the magazine itself rather than in the price. The price increase has given us an opportunity to lay out a remarkable new fiction program for the magazine and to add new features.

BEGINNING with the August issue, SMITH'S will be a better, brighter-looking magazine. There will be sections of coated paper, permitting the use of half-tone illustrations. One of the new features will be a dramatic department—not of criticism, but one devoted to the illustration and résumé of some brilliant play that has made a big success on Broadway. This will be so profusely illustrated with photographs of the New York production, and the action and dialogue of the play will be so ably and completely set forth, that any woman who reads SMITH'S regularly may feel she is almost as fortunate as if she were able to spend an evening each month at a New York theater. Moreover, should she have an opportunity, she will know exactly which play she wants most to see.

THE first play given in illustrated form in the new SMITH'S will be Belasco's comedy success, "Polly with a Past," with Ina Claire in the leading rôle.

ASIDE from the special features, we expect to make the new SMITH'S the best fiction magazine that a woman can buy anywhere at any price. The novel, "Whose Widow?" by Elinor Chipp, appearing complete in the August number, is one of those vital, stirring tales whose reading is a thrilling experience. "He Never Lied to His Wife," by Edwina Levin, is an irresistible comedy of New York life. "The Husband of Madame Cavalietti," by Beatrice York Houghton, is a tale half tragic, half comic, and wholly memorable. "Salvage," by Oscar Graeve, is a moving story of bohemian life. These are only four characteristic stories out of a big collection of live fiction.

THE new SMITH'S will give you everything the old SMITH'S gave you, and a lot more of vital interest in the way of human-interest talks, pictures, and fiction.

At all news stands—20 cents

If you are wise you will order your copy NOW!

What is a Spy?

Have you ever had that question clearly answered?
 Is an enemy alien that gives information a spy?
 Is a man who is confessedly a German officer a spy?
 Is a woman of German birth who accidentally learns something of importance and tells it a spy?

What is a spy?
 What must a person do to be shot as a spy?
 The answer to this and 2000 other questions of the war—questions that are perplexing us all when we read the many confusing details of this world cataclysm—you will find in the new authoritative

"2,000

Questions and Answers About the War"

What question do you want to ask about this war?

Whatever it is you will find the answer here, for this is the great Question Answerer about the great war.

Where—When—Why—How! From everywhere comes the questions—in newspapers—in magazines—in books—you've read until you're dizzy—but you cannot find the answers to specific questions. But here—now—we have for you the answers.

More than a thousand people on two continents have worked to make this volume. Two editorial staffs on two continents have been busy compiling. Some answers were found in books—some in Departments in Washington—some in London—some as far off as Australia. From

Secretary McAdoo to the caretaker of the Hostess House at Camp Upton, everybody has helped to answer these questions—everybody with authority and facts, and the whole thing has been made into one big volume. In it are answers to every imaginable question about the war. This magic book is more enlightening, more entertaining than any war lecturer you ever listened to. The politics of the war—the history of the war—the racial aspects of the war—the business of fighting the war—the marvelous and unending interest of the new war machinery—tanks—depth bombs—flare lights—Zeppelins—big guns—submarines—pill boxes—airplanes—parachutes and a thousand more wonders of the war are described in language you can understand.

A Dozen War Books in One!

It is a big book, 9 1/4" x 6 1/4", handsomely and durably bound in cloth.

It answers over 2,000 questions about the war, entertainingly and authoritatively, by experts.

It contains 32 pages of new war maps printed in colors.

It has a new up-to-date pronouncing dictionary of foreign names, so easy that everyone who reads may now pronounce correctly town names like Ypres, Amiens, etc.

It has four big pages of American Army and Navy insignias, enabling you to identify by rank every officer you see.

It shows a page of war medals.

It contains a nine-page, down-to-the-minute of going to press, chronology of the Great War.

Its complete contents is skillfully classified and indexed for easy and quick reference.

It is literally a dozen war books in one.

Why You Can Get This War Book FREE

So that you can "see" this great war into which America has thrown her huge strength, so that you can intelligently follow the battles in France, where the destinies of free people are the stakes, two big magazines, the METROPOLITAN and REVIEW OF REVIEWS, have united in a big subscription campaign to put both of these indispensable magazines into 100,000 American homes.

All you need do now to start the great war book and the METROPOLITAN and REVIEW OF REVIEWS in your home, each, for one year, is to mail the coupon on this page to the METROPOLITAN with only ten cents. (If you are already a subscriber to either magazine your subscription will be extended.) After that you pay \$1.00 a month for only 5 months—less than the magazines cost at the newsstands. *The Great War question book is yours free.* We even pay the carriage charges. If you prefer to make only one payment send \$4.75 with the coupon. Mail the coupon today, so that we can supply you out of the first edition of the question book. If you postpone action you may have to wait for a second printing. Act today and be among the first.

METROPOLITAN MAGAZINE

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New York.

Gentlemen: I enclose 10 cents. Send me, free by mail, *2,000 Questions and Answers About the War.* At the same time enter my subscription to METROPOLITAN and REVIEW OF REVIEWS for 15 months. I enclose \$4.75 and you \$1 a month until I have paid \$5.10 in all for the magazines. If I prefer to pay cash the total will be \$4.75. The big war book is mine free.

Name _____

Street _____

If you wish credit and are not known to our book dept., kindly send letter head, business card or names of two references.





Spies and Lies

German agents are everywhere, eager to gather scraps of news about our men, our ships, our munitions. It is still possible to get such information through to Germany, where thousands of these fragments—often individually harmless—are patiently pieced together into a whole which spells death to American soldiers and danger to American homes.

But while the enemy is most industrious in trying to collect information, and his systems elaborate, he is *not* superhuman—indeed he is very often stupid, and would fail to get what he wants were it not deliberately handed to him by the carelessness of loyal Americans.

Do not discuss in public, or with strangers, any news of troop and transport movements, of bits of gossip as to our military preparations, which come into your possession.

Do not permit your friends in service to tell you—or write you—“inside” facts about where they are, what they are doing and seeing.

Do not become a tool of the Hun by passing on the malicious, disheartening rumors which he so eagerly sows. Remember he asks no better service than to have you spread his lies of disasters to our soldiers and sailors, gross scandals in the Red Cross, cruelties, neglect and wholesale executions in our camps, drunkenness and vice in the Expeditionary Force, and other tales certain to disturb American patriots and to bring anxiety and grief to American parents.

And do not wait until you catch someone putting a bomb under a factory. Report the man who spreads pessimistic stories, divulges—or seeks—confidential military information, cries for peace, or belittles our efforts to win the war.

Send the names of such persons, even if they are in uniform, to the Department of Justice, Washington. Give all the details you can, with names of witnesses if possible—show the Hun that we can beat him at his own game of collecting scattered information and putting it to work. The fact that you made the report will not become public.

You are in contact with the enemy *today* just as truly as if you faced him across No Man's Land. In your hands are two powerful weapons with which to meet him—discretion and vigilance. *Use them.*

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION
8 JACKSON PLACE, WASHINGTON, D. C.



George Creel, Chairman
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of War
The Secretary of the Navy

U. S. Gov't Comm. on Public Information

Contributed through the Div. of Advertising

This space contributed for the Winning of the War by
THE PUBLISHERS OF AINSLEE'S



Some day **YOU** too will use this razor



This set contains a Durham-Duplex Razor with white American ivory handle, safety guard, stropping attachment and package of 3 Durham-Duplex double-edged blades (6 shaving edges) all in a handsome leather kit. Get it from your dealer or from us direct.

7,000,000 men now use the Durham-Duplex blade—the longest, strongest, keenest blade on earth. We demonstrated to their satisfaction that they could no longer dodge the inevitable, and so they became users of Durham-Duplex blades. One of these men is a friend of yours—ask him. It is our ambition to have every man in the world use a Durham-Duplex Razor.

Inevitably yours,

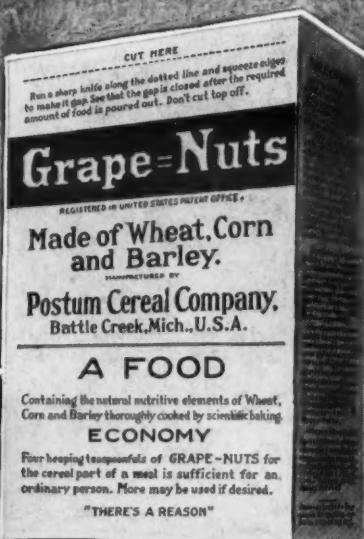
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Toronto Sheffield Paris

AMERICA'S FOREMOST READY-TO-EAT CEREAL



When war called for the saving of wheat, Grape-Nuts stood ready with its superb blend of cereals, its wonderful flavor, fullest nourishment, and practical economy.

Grape-Nuts

The Food For The Times